United Nations A/60/PV.56

General Assembly
Sixtieth session

Official Records

56th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 29 November 2005, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 75 (*continued*)

Oceans and the law of the sea

(a) Oceans and the law of the sea

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/60/63 and Add.1 and Add.2 and A/60/91)

Report of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea at its sixth meeting (A/60/99)

Draft resolution (A/60/L.22)

(b) Sustainable fisheries, including through the 1995 Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, and related instruments

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/189)

Draft resolution (A/60/L.23)

The President: I regret the confusion we experienced last night, which was due to technical problems. There was one remaining speaker, who was interrupted because of those problems.

I now call on the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, who wishes to speak in explanation of vote before the voting. May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and must be made by delegations from their seats.

Mrs. Núñez de Odremán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Our delegation will present its explanation of vote on the two draft resolutions considered under the item "Oceans and the law of the sea", contained in documents A/60/L.22 and A/60/L.23, for which we require a reasonable period of time.

With regard to the content of draft resolution A/60/L.22, our delegation wishes to express once again the commitment of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to cooperate in the protection of the oceans and seas, particularly given its importance for sustainable development.

However, our country is not party to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, nor do the Convention's norms apply to it under customary international law, except those that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has recognized or will recognize in the future, specifically by incorporating them into domestic legislation. We wish to add that the reasons that have prevented our country from acceding to the Convention still persist. Therefore, our

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delegation, reaffirming its long-standing position on the Convention, will abstain in the voting that will take place shortly.

My delegation also wishes to reiterate, with respect to the draft resolution's fourth preambular paragraph, that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea does not have a universal or integral character and does not enjoy universal or integral participation. It is not universal because it has not achieved the participation of all States. Consequently, it is not applicable to States that are not contracting parties. The draft resolution acknowledges that situation in its section I, "Implementation of the Convention and related agreements and instruments", in which it calls upon States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Convention. Secondly, it does not have an integral character because it is not a consolidated document that considers all activities concerning the oceans and seas and related matters.

Our delegation also wishes to refer to the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction (*A/60/63/Add.1*), elaborated in accordance with paragraph 74 of resolution 59/24.

We do not consider the statement made in paragraph 177 of the report to be acceptable where it refers to the Convention on the Law of the Sea as establishing the legal framework governing all activities that take place in the oceans and seas, particularly with regard to the protection and preservation of the marine environment and its living resources beyond national jurisdiction. The Convention does not have a specific regulatory regime on this matter. The report fails to mention the many regional and global agreements that regulate, within their own competencies, the protection and preservation of the marine environment and its living resources. Most important, it fails to mention the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is a framework instrument for regulating the conservation and use of biological diversity in all its aspects.

I now turn to draft resolution A/60/L.23, on the item "Sustainable fisheries, including through the 1995 Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, and related instruments."

Our delegation wishes to stress that a priority area for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is regulation of the fisheries sector and aquaculture, for which we have developed a broad set of legal-technical norms, contained in the law on fisheries and aquaculture. That enables us to carry out programmes to conserve, protect and manage marine biological resources in order to promote their responsible and sustainable use, taking into account the relevant biological, economic, food safety, social, cultural, environmental and commercial aspects.

The regulation of the fisheries sector also covers national fishing vessels. A control and inspection mechanism is in place for the activities of national fishing vessels on the high seas, using a system of reports to the body tasked with fishing management and the enforcement of the aforementioned law. Those reports make it possible to know the exact geographical location where fishing operations take place as well as to receive information on compliance with legal norms regulating the use of resources.

Measures taken by Venezuela to deal with illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing are implemented by means of periodic reports to regional fisheries management organizations on national fishing vessels fishing legally in international waters or in areas under the jurisdiction of other countries.

Our fisheries regulations mandate the use of global positioning satellite equipment on fishing vessels larger than 30 gross tons and the use of duly authorized on-board observers, who collect necessary information for the authorities. The fishery regulations also address fishing capacity and bottom trawling through a sanctions regime for non-compliance with conservation and management regulations.

We stress that the participation of citizens in fishing activities covered by relevant international laws is a principle addressed by our fishing and aquaculture regulations. The National Fisheries and Aquaculture Institute promotes the consultation and effective participation of people involved in fishing and aquaculture as individuals or as members of cooperatives or other organizations such as those of shipowners, processors, fisheries trade unions, industry, researchers, financial and educational organizations and of other qualified individuals

involved in the elaboration of plans for developing fisheries and aquaculture and related activities.

At the international level, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has implemented the principles of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and chapter 18 of Agenda 21, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. It has actively participated in the work of regional fisheries management organizations such as the Committee on Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies, the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission, the Latin American Fisheries Development Organization, the Commission for Inland Fisheries of Latin America, the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission.

Venezuela is a contracting party to agreements such as the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region and its Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife, the negotiations on which Venezuela participated from the start. Venezuela is also party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and the Convention on Biological Diversity, which we consider to be the appropriate legal framework for regulating the conservation and the use of biological diversity in all its aspects. Venezuela has also signed bilateral fisheries agreements, including accords with Trinidad and Tobago and the Republic of Suriname.

However, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is not a party to the Convention on the Law of the Sea nor to the 1995 Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the Convention on the Law of the Sea relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, and related instruments. Nor is it bound by the provisions of that Agreement under customary international law, save those provisions that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has expressly recognized, or will recognize in the future, by means of their incorporation into domestic legislation. The reasons that prevented their ratification persist today. Thus, my delegation is not in a position to support draft resolution A/60/L.23, on sustainable fisheries, including through the 1995 Fish Stocks Agreement.

My delegation will not block the consensus adoption of the draft resolution, in spite of the fact that it confirms a historic position with regard to the Convention on the Law of the Sea and related instruments, in the light of which, given certain aspects of the present draft resolution, we express our explicit reservations with respect to the draft resolution.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote before the vote. The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolutions A/60/L.22 and A/60/L.23.

We turn first to draft resolution A/60/L.22, entitled "Oceans and the law of the sea". The following countries have become sponsors of the draft resolution: Belgium, Croatia, Fiji, Honduras, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Sweden and Uruguay.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and

the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Serbia and Montenegro, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Viet Nam, Yemen.

Against:

Turkey.

Abstaining:

Colombia, Ecuador, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Venezuela.

Draft resolution A/60/L.22 was adopted by 141 votes to 1, with 4 abstentions (resolution 60/30).

[Subsequently, the delegations of Fiji, Ghana, Haiti, Nepal and Vanuatu informed the Secretariat that they had intended to vote in favour.]

The President: We turn next to draft resolution A/60/L.23, entitled "Sustainable fisheries, including through the 1995 Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, and related instruments".

The following countries have been added to the list of sponsors: Belgium, Fiji, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Sweden and Uruguay.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.23?

Draft resolution A/60/L.23 was adopted (resolution 60/31).

The President: Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of vote after the vote, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes. They should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Llanos (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Chile has joined the consensus for the adoption of the draft resolution on sustainable fisheries, contained in A/60/L.23, with the following understanding.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea contains independent and comprehensive standards on high seas fishing that are fully valid in themselves. We have been able to join the consensus with respect to the 1995 Agreement of for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, better known as the New York Agreement. We have done so because, even though Chile is not a party to the Agreement, it agrees with the principles of the Agreement and applies them.

We believe that the principle of compatibility, clearly stated in the instruments cited in the resolution and international practice, should be fully complied with on the high seas by all high-seas fishing vessels and by each corresponding coastal State when that involves resources associated with and present in the marine area as well as in the respective exclusive economic zone.

Mr. Hart (Barbados): Barbados firmly supports the sentiments expressed in paragraph 46 of resolution A/60/L.22, which is virtually identical to paragraph 56 (o) of the World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1). We particularly support the emphasis on dialogue among States on the development of international regulatory regimes to enhance safety, disclosure, liability, security and compensation in relation to the transport of radioactive materials through the regions of small island developing States. In voting in favour of the resolution, it is our understanding that the Secretary-General, in his report to the sixty-first session of the General Assembly on oceans and the law of the sea, will report in a comprehensive manner on all issues contained in paragraph 46 of document A/60/L.22, concerning the shipment of nuclear and radioactive waste.

Barbados firmly rejects the argument, advanced by some, that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) are the only entities that should pronounce themselves on that issue. As our leaders acknowledged in the Mauritius Strategy for small island developing States, as well as in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the complexity of the issue requires much broader intergovernmental consideration of its various aspects. Barbados considers the General Assembly — the chief deliberative, policymaking, representative and

democratic organ of the United Nations — to be the only appropriate and legitimate forum to address the issue in all its many aspects.

It is a matter of great concern to Barbados that in attempting to justify those highly dangerous shipments, some have pointed to the safety record of such shipments. We cannot consider that a legitimate argument in the post-9/11 environment, where nothing is beyond the realm of possibility. In addition, should action be delayed to only after an accident or a terrorist attack on one of those shipments?

In conclusion, let me reiterate the position of Barbados on the issue, as contained in the Declaration of Panama, issued by the Association of Caribbean States at its fourth summit in July of this year. Heads of State or Government strenuously and forcefully rejected

> "the continued use of the Caribbean Sea for the shipment and trans-shipment of nuclear material and toxic waste, given the threat that any accidental or deliberately induced spill of these materials would represent to the life and ecosystem of the region".

The President: We have heard the last speaker explain their vote after the vote. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 75 and its sub-items (a) and (b)?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 17

The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Agenda item 73

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(e) Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/224)

Draft resolution (A/60/L.27)

The President: Afghanistan continues to face serious threats and challenges, ranging from security development to humanitarian assistance. Assistance by the international community in peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and providing funds is essential. That support by the international community is of crucial importance.

The United Nations and specialized agencies will continue to play an important role in the post-Bonn process. In the political sphere, parliamentary and provincial council elections held on 18 September 2005 led to the completion of the Bonn process and demonstrated the broad commitment of Afghan voters towards a democratic future.

In the realm of development and reconstruction, Afghanistan will play the leading role in the reconstruction process, inter alia, by preparing an interim national development strategy. At the same time, funds will be needed, and there will be a conference in London in January next year to help that effort.

Concerning security, there have been successes, but more needs to be done. There is a continuing need for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as for the disbanding of illegal armed groups and for putting an end to the recruitment of child soldiers. The continued threat posed by terrorist groups has to be firmly addressed. In that context, I commend the Afghan National Army and Police, the International Security Assistance Force and the Operation Enduring Freedom coalition for their contributions in improving security conditions, including for the electoral process in Afghanistan.

With regard to the counter-narcotics effort and the fight against drug cultivation, as was stated in a report issued last week by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, progress has been made but more definitely needs to be achieved. The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, including the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons, remains critical. In that regard, the safety, security and free movement of all United Nations, development and humanitarian personnel have to be ensured. We should recall the actions taken by the Sixth Committee, also soon to be noted in this Hall, on the protection of personnel in peacebuilding situations.

In addition, ensuring the respect for human rights and protecting the role of women, including through participation in the political process and reform of the judicial sector, has to be a priority in the reconstruction process.

Finally, it is gratifying — I think we all agree — to reaffirm the importance of the United Nations in the mobilization of the international community to achieve development, security and respect for human rights in Afghanistan.

I now give the floor to the representative of Germany to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.27.

Mr. Pleuger (Germany): As in previous years, I have the honour to introduce the General Assembly's annual draft resolution on Afghanistan. Let me say at the outset that Germany fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union, which will be presented later by the British presidency of the European Union.

Our debate almost coincides with the end of the Bonn process, that is, the "establishment of a broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative government", as it was defined in the Bonn Accord in December 2001 (*S/2001/1154*). The end of the Bonn process is a major step for Afghanistan and for the international community. We have come a long way since 2001.

When delegates met in the Petersberg near Bonn in 2001 their task was by no means easy: What was entitled the "Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions" was nothing less than the drawing up of a blueprint for a new order in Afghanistan.

After 23 years of war we were faced with a number of challenges, including a country with a physical and institutional infrastructure that was destroyed beyond belief. At peak times, over 7 million refugees were living under difficult conditions, mostly in neighbouring countries, burdening the social fabric of those populations. Children were without hope for a decent future in peace and prosperity and women were shut away behind closed doors. An elite had left the country, and there were ethnic minorities having no say in the shaping of their own country.

What have we achieved in the meantime? No doubt the Bonn process has suffered delays and setbacks. But, given the dire circumstances at the outset, we have done far better than could have been expected — and, indeed, was expected — by many in 2001.

Today, all the provisions of the Bonn Agreement have been implemented. The newly elected parliament is expected to convene for its opening session in mid-December. Furthermore, all the commissions have been established, as required by the Bonn Agreement. A new currency has been introduced. The process of demobilizing and disarming ex-combatants of the Afghan military forces was finalized under Japanese leadership this summer. The process of reshaping institutions such as the national army and police and of rebuilding the judicial, health and education system has started and is already showing results.

The security situation has improved in large parts of the country. Infrastructural and economic reconstruction has taken off. The situation of women has improved: girls are again going to school, college and university; women have increasing work opportunities, and there are now three female ministers in the Afghan Cabinet. Ten per cent of the candidates in the parliamentary and provincial council elections in September 2005 were women. A total of 27.4 per cent of the members of the Wolesi Jirga, the lower house of the Afghan parliament, are women — that is actually more than in many parliaments in Western countries.

The new parliament will be multi-ethnically balanced, as is the current Afghan Government. The central Government has extended its powers beyond Kabul. Trust in the future of Afghanistan has been restored, as demonstrated by the return of 3.5 million Afghan refugees since 2002. It is important, in our view, that Afghanistan, with the support of the international community, strengthen its efforts to create conditions to allow the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return and reintegration of additional Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons.

How have we achieved all of that? First, the Bonn Agreement set out a detailed agenda for the political process in Afghanistan, defining targets and concrete deadlines. Secondly, substantial United Nations involvement from the beginning that included coordination on the ground by the United Nations Mission of Assistance in Afghanistan proved crucial to the peace and reconstruction process. A strong United

Nations role will remain indispensable for the next stage, as well.

Thirdly, it was understood that the peace process would have a chance of being successful only if it was comprehensive. Reconstruction is not possible without security and an institutional network.

Fourthly, the security components were given different tasks. While it was cooperating closely wherever necessary, Operation Enduring Freedom was equipped with a robust mandate to effectively combat existing terrorist structures in Afghanistan, in cooperation with the Afghan National Army. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was meant to provide stabilization and assistance. Through its Provincial Reconstruction Teams, it has expanded into the northern and western regions, and it is currently expanding into the south of Afghanistan, ensuring security in cooperation with the central and local governments.

Fifthly, the substantial financial and institutional commitment of the international community has been essential in the cooperative effort to bring about change. The international community pledged $8.4 billion for the reconstruction of Afghanistan at the Berlin conference in April 2004. Thousands of troops from Operation Enduring Freedom and 9,500 ISAF troops played, and are continuing to play, a pivotal role in the security of the country.

Sixthly, a strong multilateral and multinational approach made effective peacebuilding possible. It was understood that no country or international organization alone would be able to bear the burden of and responsibility for the peace and reconstruction process in Afghanistan. That made close cooperation and coordination essential in order to avoid duplication. Today, many nations participate in Operation Enduring Freedom, and 36 contribute troops to ISAF. Five nations — the United States, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom and Italy — have taken the lead in reforming the security sector in Afghanistan.

Last — but certainly not least — there is evident and decisive Afghan ownership. In addition to the support of the international community, the Afghan people, tired of war and misery, have defined and implemented all the steps taken in the Bonn Agreement.

What are the challenges and the way ahead? We have come a long way. Nevertheless, great challenges still lie ahead for Afghanistan. The security situation is still volatile, and the fight against terrorism has not been won yet. Ordinary criminality and corruption are on the rise. Local power holders — some closely linked to the drug trade — still maintain military power and political influence. The warlord or criminal backgrounds of some of the future members of parliament will have to be dealt with. Up to 1,800 illegal militias still exist, which represent tens of thousands of armed troops, now need to be demilitarized.

It goes without saying that Afghanistan must carry out the task in its own way. Local ownership is crucial for the sustainability and success of the process.

We believe that this year's draft resolution reflects the progress achieved, as well as the challenges lying ahead. The draft resolution focuses on security, on elections and on the beginning of the post-Bonn process, as well as on the production and trading of drugs. It considers humanitarian assistance, recovery and reconstruction. The unresolved issue of claims for land property is also addressed. With normalization progressing, we expect reconstruction to prevail over humanitarian concerns in the years to come.

The negotiations on the draft resolution have been swift and marked by a broad consensus among participants. Let me thank the delegation of Afghanistan for its constructive cooperation over recent weeks. Furthermore, the fact that these are more than 120 sponsors demonstrates the overall unanimity of the international community, as represented in the General Assembly, with regard to developments in Afghanistan. The draft resolution carries a strong message from this Hall to the Afghan people.

We have suggested changing the format of the draft resolution next year to reflect the new stage that Afghanistan is entering at the end of the Bonn process. It would be a single draft resolution, under one agenda item, covering the different aspects of security, reconstruction and governance, so far dealt with under parts A and B of the resolution. That suggestion has been welcomed by many delegations.

Afghanistan has the potential to be an excellent model for peacebuilding. Its example shows that military intervention should always be followed by active State-building. State-building and peacebuilding

in Afghanistan are also part of the process of addressing global challenges such as international terrorism.

Germany has long-standing ties with Afghanistan. We have contributed to the rebuilding of a stable and democratic Afghanistan since 2001 to a degree unmatched by our engagement elsewhere. The agenda for the reconstruction process was laid down by three international Afghanistan conferences in Germany, held in Bonn in 2001 and 2002 and in Berlin in 2004.

For the period from 2002 and until 2008, Germany has pledged €640 million — $760 million — in kind for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. We have tried to take a truly holistic approach to rebuilding the country — encompassing military, political, civilian, educational, cultural and economic development — because we firmly believe that a comprehensive approach is the key to success.

In the military sphere, Germany is the largest troop contributor to ISAF. In the area of security sector reform, we have taken the lead in international assistance aimed at building up, training and equipping a qualified and professional national police force, which includes the Afghan border police and an anti-narcotics police force. Since 2002, Germany has spent approximately €70 million on the reconstitution of the Afghan police.

Our commitment to reconstruction and peace in Afghanistan will continue under the new German Government. In the spirit of the Bonn process, we support the United Nations, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Kingdom in their preparation for the London conference in January 2006. We look forward to a substantial outcome of that conference.

I should like to introduce an oral revision to the draft resolution at this late stage. We would like to revise operative paragraph 5 of part B of the draft resolution. This revision was suggested by the delegation of France and has been supported by a number of interested delegations. It does not change the substance of the paragraph in any way; it is intended only to ensure full consistency with relevant international instruments on the protection of children in armed conflict.

The revised operative paragraph 5 of part B would read as follows:

> "Expresses its concern about the recruitment and use of child soldiers by illegal armed groups in Afghanistan, reiterates the importance of ending the use of children contrary to international law, and welcomes the accession by Afghanistan to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols".

I hope that that revision will be acceptable to all Member States.

Before concluding, I should like to inform the Assembly that the following countries have become sponsors of the draft resolution since it was issued: Armenia, Belize, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Maldives, Mali, Mauritius, Micronesia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Oman, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Saint Lucia, the Solomon Islands, the Sudan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United States of America, Uruguay and Yemen.

We sincerely hope that this draft resolution will enjoy the consensus that it has always enjoyed in the General Assembly.

The President: The Secretariat has the text of the oral revision to draft resolution A/60/L.27, which is available to delegations.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan): We have gathered here today, one week prior to the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Bonn Agreement, on 5 December 2001. It is high time to evaluate the developments that have transpired in Afghanistan over the past four years and to assess the remaining challenges ahead of us.

Just two months ago, on 18 September 2005, millions of men and women, in defiance of all the threats posed by those aiming to derail the political process, went to the polls to elect their representatives to Afghanistan's national assembly and provincial councils. More than 5,000 Afghan men and women — in exercise of their democratic right — had nominated themselves as candidates. The significant role of women was clearly reflected throughout the electoral process, as they constituted a considerable number of the registered voters. Furthermore, 27 per cent of the

representatives to the national assembly will be women. Indeed, such a level of participation by women in the political life of Afghanistan is unprecedented. The first session of the newly elected parliament is scheduled to convene next month, marking a new chapter in Afghanistan's recent history.

The conclusion of the parliamentary and provincial elections is yet another major step towards the consolidation of democracy in Afghanistan, because it took place after the implementation of the following provisions of the Bonn Agreement: the convening of the emergency Loya Jirga in July 2002; the adoption of a new constitution in January 2004 safeguarding the fundamental freedoms and equal rights of all citizens; and the holding of the first-ever presidential elections on 9 October 2004.

As a result, we have now reached the end of the political agenda of the Bonn process. In that context, I would like to express, on behalf of my Government, sincere gratitude to the United Nations, to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, to the Coalition forces and to other international partners for their solid commitment and support.

Since the adoption of last year's General Assembly resolution 59/112A-B, on Afghanistan, we have made additional gains in various areas. Substantial progress continues to take place towards the formation of our national army and police. We are on track to achieve a standing professional army of 43,000 soldiers by the end of 2007. The Afghan national army continues to conduct joint military operations with coalition forces against members of Al-Qaida and the Taliban in the south and south-east of the country. Furthermore, approximately 30,000 national police officers are working to improve the security situation throughout the country.

We are now in the final phase of the completion of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, as approximately 60,000 former combatants have been disarmed and demobilized. However, the successful achievement of the DDR process demands the implementation of all three phases of the process. As we have succeeded in completing the first two phases, the final component of the process, namely the reintegration of ex-combatants, must be addressed with the same degree of attention accorded to the first two phases. We have also made advances in the disbandment of illegal armed groups, in line with the programme to that effect.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan continues to enhance the protection and promotion of human rights throughout the country. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission has further expanded its activities to various parts of Afghanistan.

Moreover, the number of children returning to school has increased from 4 million to approximately 5 million since last year. Likewise, the number of refugees returning from neighbouring countries has also increased significantly, indicating that relative peace and stability prevail in most parts of the country.

Despite the fact that the final provision of the Bonn Agreement has been implemented, many challenges remain in Afghanistan. The lack of security in parts of the south and south-east of Afghanistan — resulting from the renewed activities of the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other extremist groups — is considered to be the main challenge to the stability and development of Afghanistan. That concern is rightly reflected in paragraph 11 of the draft resolution on Afghanistan that is currently before the Assembly and in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan dated 12 August 2005 (*A/60/334*).

In that context, we would like to welcome once again the adoption of Security Council resolution 1623 (2005) of 13 September 2005 in which the Council renewed the mandate of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan until October 2006.

The recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan underscore the continued threat posed by international terrorism to the peace, stability and reconstruction of the country. My Government reaffirms its steadfast commitment to combat that scourge in all its forms and manifestations. In this context, let me reiterate that success in the combat against terrorism in Afghanistan demands the sincere commitment of the countries of the region.

The cultivation, production and trafficking of narcotic drugs is another impediment to the consolidation of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. In that regard, my Government has taken significant steps aimed at the elimination of that scourge. The establishment of a counter-narcotics Ministry; the introduction of a comprehensive counter-

Narcotics Implementation Plan; the establishment of a Special Tribunal to prosecute those engaged in the illicit cultivation, production and trafficking of illicit drugs; and, finally, the creation of a Counter-Narcotics Trust Fund are but some of the initiatives taken by my Government to address the issue of narcotics.

We are pleased to have been able to achieve a 21 per cent reduction in opium poppy cultivation in the current year. We would also like to emphasize the importance of providing alternative livelihoods to farmers in order to reduce the incentive for the cultivation and production of opium. For its part, Afghanistan remains committed to exerting all efforts within its capacity to counter the production and trafficking of narcotics. On that note, let me emphasize that, due to the demand-driven nature of the illicit drug trade, additional steps are required on the part of transit and consuming countries to effectively curtail this trade. Afghanistan, definitively, will not be a narco-State.

Poverty, infant and maternal mortality, malnutrition and the lack of resources necessary to provide adequate health care are some of the other challenges facing the people of Afghanistan. In order to address those issues, the Government of Afghanistan has prepared the Afghan National Development Strategy. That strategy encompasses a clear approach to achieving sustainable poverty reduction and long-term economic and social development. Afghanistan's National Development Strategy will be officially presented at the donors conference on Afghanistan, scheduled to be convened in London by the end of January 2006. The sustained engagement of the international community in Afghanistan is crucial to achieving the objectives contained in the Afghan National Development Strategy.

My Government would like to emphasize the need to speed up the pace of the reconstruction and development of country, given the direct relationship between development and security. In that context, my delegation stresses the importance of continued international aid in a coordinated and sustained manner.

The successful conclusion of the Bonn Agreement should not mean the end of the international community's engagement in Afghanistan; rather, it should constitute the beginning of a new phase of international commitment. In that regard, the Afghan Government looks forward to the convening of the upcoming London conference on Afghanistan, at which the Government of Afghanistan and the international community will renew their partnership to build on the success of the Bonn Agreement during the post-Bonn process.

In achieving the remaining objectives, the post-Bonn engagement between Afghanistan and the international community should be guided by the following key principles: the leadership role of the Afghan Government in all aspects of the reconstruction process; the need for a just allocation of resources throughout the country; the need to ensure that international efforts serve to build lasting capacity and sustainable institutions; and finally, the need to ensure public transparency and accountability at all levels.

In conclusion, allow me to extend my delegation's sincere appreciation to the German delegation, in particular to His Excellency Ambassador Pleuger for his tireless efforts in preparing the draft resolution on Afghanistan before us. In addition, special thanks to Ms. Beate Mayder-Metcalf and Mr. Axel Kreuchle for having led the consultations with the delegations, resulting in the successful adoption of the resolution. We thank all delegations who contributed to the consultations.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Finally, let me seize this opportunity to also express my delegation's sincere gratitude to all Members that have co-sponsored the General Assembly resolution on Afghanistan.

Ms. Davis (United Kingdom): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Croatia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Liechtenstein, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

Building on the success of the 2004 presidential elections, the 18 September parliamentary and provincial elections represent a significant achievement and important milestone for Afghanistan. They mark another step on the road to stability, security and prosperity for the Afghan people. The successful holding of those complex and challenging elections

was testimony to the hard work of many people and organizations, both Afghan and international.

On behalf of the European Union I would like to express our admiration for the Afghan people, who demonstrated their resolve by exercising their right to vote. I would also like to recognize the leading role played by the United Nations and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in leading Afghanistan to where it is today. In doing so, I reiterate our gratitude to all the organizations involved in making the elections possible, including the Joint Electoral Management Body, UNAMA, the United Nations Development Programme and the Afghan and international security forces.

For its part, the European Union contributed considerably with its Election Observer Mission, as well as with the provision of technical support and over €60 million in financial assistance. We also welcome NATO's ongoing contribution to achieving security throughout the country. Many EU member States contribute to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force and run provincial reconstruction teams throughout the country.

While much has been achieved in Afghanistan, particularly over the last year, we must not be complacent. Many challenges lie ahead. The international community must maintain, and indeed strengthen, its sustainable engagement in Afghanistan to support Afghan ownership and enhance capacity-building in order to make a success of the next phase of reform.

The London conference, to be hosted by the United Kingdom, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations at the end of January, will provide a platform to reiterate the international community's long-term commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction. The conference aims to agree on a new compact between the Afghan Government and the international community, which will be based on Afghan ownership and will help deliver the kind of international donor support needed in the next phase of reform. The conference will also allow Afghanistan to set out its plans and priorities, as envisaged in the interim Afghanistan national development strategy.

The European Union's commitment to Afghanistan is outlined in the European Union-Afghanistan Joint Declaration signed in Strasbourg on 16 November. In that document, the EU welcomed the huge strides made by Afghanistan since the Bonn Agreement in 2001 and highlighted the leading roles of the EU and its member States in assisting Afghanistan in implementing its reconstruction plans, pledging a total of €3.1 billion in aid over the period from 2002 until 2006.

The Joint Declaration demonstrates our desire to build on the success of the Bonn Agreement and to establish shared priorities for the next phase in Afghanistan's reconstruction. It will now form the basis for strengthening the EU-Afghan partnership across a wide range of areas, including political and economic governance, security sector reform and justice sector reform, counter-narcotics, development, human rights, civil society and refugee return, education and culture.

Significant progress has also been made in security sector reform. Over 29,000 military and police personnel have been trained, and the Afghan army is now more professional, accountable and ethnically balanced. The EU reiterates the need for further progress in that sector.

On justice sector reform, progress has been made with respect to the adoption of essential legislation, training of personnel and the rehabilitation of physical infrastructure, including courts and correctional facilities. At the same time, improving the rule of law and consolidating a fair and impartial administration of justice remain crucial for the creation of a stable and peaceful Afghanistan and thus require sustained and coordinated action and investment.

The European Union also welcomes the progress made in the area of disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation (DDR), with over 60,000 men having entered the DDR process. However, significant challenges lie ahead as the focus now shifts to disarming illegal armed groups. The EU supports the new United Nations Government of Afghanistan programme, which is currently in its pilot phase.

The European Union continues to attach importance to the protection of human rights, with a particular focus on promoting women's and children's rights. The EU welcomes the ongoing efforts of the Afghan authorities in that regard. We remain concerned at continued reports of violence against women and girls and of trafficking in women and children, and we welcome the efforts of the Afghan authorities to address that issue. We also welcome the high

participation by women in the elections and the high representation of women in the new parliament.

The European Union congratulates President Karzai and the Government of Afghanistan on the significant achievement of a 21 per cent reduction in opium poppy cultivation, from 130,000 hectares in 2003-2004 to 104,000 hectares in 2004-2005. However, the trade in drugs remains the most significant challenge to the long-term stability, security, development and governance of Afghanistan. It also undermines the stability of the region and accounts for approximately 90 per cent of the heroin reaching the streets of Europe.

There remains a need to secure a sustained decrease in opium poppy cultivation, production and trafficking into 2006 and beyond. We therefore encourage the international community to work more closely with the Government of Afghanistan and Afghanistan's neighbours, including through the Counter-Narcotics Trust Fund, in support of the Afghan counter-narcotics strategy. The European Union looks forward to the publication of the Government of Afghanistan's national drug control strategy.

Allow me to conclude by stressing that the European Union remains committed to the long-term reconstruction of Afghanistan and pledges to work with the Afghan Government and international partners to build a prosperous, secure and sustainable Afghanistan.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): With the successful holding of parliamentary and provincial council elections in September, Afghanistan has passed the last major milestone in the Bonn political process. The forthcoming inauguration of the new Parliament, we hope, augurs Afghanistan's continued progress towards durable peace and stability.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are inextricably bound by history, culture, faith and mutual interdependence. The spirit of the relationship between our peoples was demonstrated by the generous and immediate assistance provided to us by brotherly Afghanistan in the wake of the tragic 8 October earthquake.

We commend our Afghan brethren for their steadfast commitment to peace, reconciliation and development. A peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan is in the best interests of Pakistan and, indeed, of the entire region. Peace will enable the safe and dignified return of the 3 million Afghan refugees still in Pakistan. Economic revival in Afghanistan will accelerate the already burgeoning trade and economic cooperation between our countries. Peace in Afghanistan will also open up the shortest transit routes for trade in energy, raw materials and goods between Central Asia, South Asia and the world, with enormous economic benefits for Afghanistan, Pakistan and all the countries of the region. Pakistan and Afghanistan are both members of the Economic Cooperation Organization. Earlier this month, Pakistan actively supported, and warmly welcomes, Afghanistan's entry as a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

The close bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are marked by the frequent exchange of high-level visits, progressive institutionalization and cooperation in diverse fields, and record levels of transit trade and bilateral trade. Pakistan is also actively participating in Afghanistan's reconstruction. During the visit of our Prime Minister to Kabul in July this year, additional assistance of $100 million was committed. Those funds will be utilized in consultation with and on projects identified by the Afghan Government. Of the $100 million pledged earlier by Pakistan at the Tokyo Conference, almost $50 million have been utilized for humanitarian assistance, projects in infrastructure, health, education and transport sectors, and the capacity-building of State institutions. Pakistan is also providing training to Afghan officials in several fields, including diplomacy, the judiciary, the police, counter-narcotics, agriculture, customs and banking. A brief overview of Pakistan's contribution to reconstruction in Afghanistan is being circulated with my statement.

Sustaining the progress made by Afghanistan over the past four years requires the continued support of the international community to overcome the remaining daunting challenges faced by Afghanistan — terrorist threats, narcotics, drug barons, warlords, illegal armed groups, the reintegration of the Afghan military forces, the development of institutions, the rule of law and justice sector reform, the fight against corruption, the promotion of national reconciliation, the safe and orderly return of Afghan refugees, human rights and, above all, economic and social development and reconstruction. The conference planned for early next year in London should reaffirm the international

community's support for the post-Bonn phase of nation-building in Afghanistan. The United Nations must continue to play a vital role in Afghanistan's stabilization and development.

Draft resolution A/60/L.27, under consideration today, presents a broad overview of the situation in Afghanistan. We thank the delegation of Germany for coordinating the formulation of the draft resolution, which was introduced by Ambassador Gunter Pleuger. Pakistan is a sponsor of the draft, which we hope will be adopted by consensus.

Insecurity remains a major challenge to Afghanistan's stabilization and reconstruction. We condemn the recent attacks in Afghanistan. The causes of insecurity are several and complex — terrorist and extremist elements, criminal activity and the illicit production and trafficking of drugs, besides the perennial problems of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment. The Afghan Government must continue to receive the support of the International Security Assistance Force and the Operation Enduring Freedom coalition in building security. Pakistan supports the presence of international forces in Afghanistan, and their strengthening as necessary, until peace and stability are fully restored and a viable Afghan national army can assume full responsibility for the country's security.

For its part, Pakistan has mounted a determined campaign to eliminate Al-Qaida and Taliban elements on our side of the border and to prevent illegal cross-border movement. The Afghanistan-Pakistan-United States Tripartite Commission coordinates that cooperative campaign. We have deployed 75,000 troops and established 700 posts along the border. Another 4,000 troops were added for interdiction duties in the run-up to the Afghan parliamentary elections. We have also proposed the partial fencing of the border to minimize opportunities for illegal movement.

I should recall that Pakistan's operations have killed or captured over 700 Al-Qaida and Taliban terrorist elements. As a result of our efforts, Al-Qaida's command and control structure has been largely dismantled. Our forces have, unfortunately, suffered over 200 casualties in those operations. It is most disappointing, therefore, that those Pakistani efforts and sacrifices fail to find mention in the Secretary-General's report. May I note here that Pakistan's troop strength on the border with Afghanistan — 75,000 — far exceeds the combined strength of the national and international military presence within Afghanistan.

Narcotics remain a major and pervasive problem in Afghanistan. As a recent survey has shown, much more needs to be done to overcome that challenge to both security and development. Promoting alternative livelihoods is the key to moving away from a drugs-based economy. Considerably more assistance needs to reach farmers directly as a disincentive for poppy cultivation. Efforts are also required to reduce the demand for drugs in destination countries and to combat the illicit trafficking of precursors. To coordinate efforts for the interdiction of narcotics and precursor chemical flows, a counter-narcotics working group, comprising officials of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the coalition forces, has been established.

Pakistan continues to look forward to the voluntary return, in safety and honour, of the 3 million Afghan refugees whom we still host. We host them, I should mention, without any appreciable international assistance. Their orderly return and effective reintegration will contribute to the stability of Afghanistan and the region. Greater international assistance is needed in that context, including through the extension of the voluntary repatriation programme for Afghan refugees in Pakistan, which is sponsored by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — a programme that is due to be terminated next March.

The figures from the census of Afghans living in Pakistan, which was held in February and March 2005, underscore the need for concerted efforts to increase Afghanistan's capacity to absorb returnees by introducing employment-generating reconstruction schemes and providing land and shelter, in addition to ensuring security. We support and appreciate the recent call by High Commissioner António Guterres to take the needs of the repatriating refugees into account in the development plans to be considered at the forthcoming London conference. The international community must also assist Pakistan in rehabilitation of the refugee-affected areas of Pakistan.

Success in Afghanistan will require a long-term commitment and a comprehensive strategy to address security, political, economic and social issues. As the Secretary-General observes in his report, even without the burden of violent insurgency, the reconstruction of

Afghanistan faces a truly formidable combination of challenges, including the pervasive drug economy and some of the lowest social and economic indicators in the world.

The discussion of the post-Bonn agenda provides a unique opportunity for a broad dialogue between Afghanistan and the international community. Pakistan stands ready to play its part in that process. We urge the international community to stay the course until durable peace and greater prosperity is achieved in Afghanistan.

Ms. Banks (New Zealand): New Zealand is pleased to be a sponsor of the two draft resolutions on Afghanistan (*A/60/L.27, A and B*): "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security" and "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan".

New Zealand applauds the contribution that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and Member States have made in assisting in the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

New Zealand welcomes, and congratulates the people of Afghanistan on, the progress they have made in implementing the Bonn accord, in particular the successful holding of elections on 18 September.

Much has been achieved since 2001, although much remains to be done before Afghanistan can look forward with confidence to the future. New Zealand looks forward to participating in the conference on the post-Bonn process for Afghanistan, to be held in London next January, and to discussing the role of the international community in Afghanistan. We are a small country, but we will continue to play our part. New Zealand is committed to supporting the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to restore peace and security to the country and to make further progress on the economic and social development of all of the Afghan people.

New Zealand's contributions to Afghanistan since 2001 and its commitments to June 2006 exceed 110 million New Zealand dollars. Those contributions have taken the form of security assistance and development support. New Zealand forces have been deployed to the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamyan Province since September 2003.

New Zealand's development assistance is focused on projects or programmes carried out by non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies. We are supporting governance, human rights and sustainable rural livelihoods. We are also providing training for police in Bamyan Province.

In response to the need to address the production of opium in Afghanistan, we have recently contributed $500,000 to the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund. We hope that the Government of Afghanistan can help its farmers to reduce their economic reliance on poppy cultivation by ensuring security and enhancing local governance, along with the promotion of agricultural diversification and the improvement of access to alternative sustainable income-generating activities.

New Zealand encourages the Afghan Government to continue to address areas of human rights concern, in particular women's rights. The level of female participation in the September election represents a big success. Female candidates actively contested the 68 seats reserved for women in the lower house. The results showed that many would have been elected even without the quota system. The election has, we hope, consolidated women's participation in Afghanistan's political life. New Zealand continues to support the work of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

The international community must maintain its commitment to Afghanistan, where President Karzai's Government continues to face significant challenges. Improving security outside Kabul will be a crucial element in bringing political stability to Afghanistan. It is in the interests of us all to assist in the restoration of Afghanistan — not only for the well-being of the Afghan people, but also because of the contribution that a stable and developing Afghanistan will be able to make to international peace and security.

Mr. Sen (India): I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for having scheduled this important debate on Afghanistan, providing as it does an opportunity for Member States to engage on this critical issue in the General Assembly. We therefore welcome the opportunity to participate in this discussion under the relevant agenda items.

The pace of democratic change in Afghanistan has been remarkable by any standards. Afghanistan's successful achievement of democracy's milestones —

the historic election of its President, the entry into force of its first-ever constitution and, most recently, full democratic parliamentary elections — is testimony to the courage and conviction of its citizens and leaders.

It was only last week that confirmation of the final results of the parliamentary and provincial council elections was received, thus marking the successful conclusion of the Bonn process. We congratulate the people of Afghanistan on the successful holding of those elections, which constitute an important stage in Afghanistan's journey towards a peaceful, stable and prosperous society. That amply demonstrates, once again, the choice of the Afghan people for a non-violent and democratic way of life and Afghanistan's readiness to emerge as a democracy, with a commitment to individual rights, the rule of law an open society and an open polity.

India's support for a sovereign, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan was reiterated during the visit of the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Manmohan Singh, to Kabul in August 2005, when he conveyed India's readiness to continue contributing to the task of rebuilding Afghanistan, including through the strengthening of its democratic institutions. During his visit, the Prime Minister, together with Baba-e-Millat, former King Zahir Shah, laid the foundation stone of the building which would house the newly constituted parliament of Afghanistan. The parliament building is being constructed with Indian funding — a manifestation of India's commitment to democracy in Afghanistan.

As in previous years, India co-sponsored the General Assembly's draft resolution on Afghanistan. In our view, the draft resolution provides a balanced overview of the situation in Afghanistan. Among other things, it calls upon the Government of Afghanistan to continue to address the threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan posed by Al-Qaida operatives, the Taliban and other terrorist or extremist groups, as well as by criminal violence, in particular violence integral to the drug trade; endorses the key principles of cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community during the post-Bonn process, as set out in the Secretary-General's report; and welcomes the readiness of the Government of Afghanistan to prepare an interim national development strategy, to be considered at a conference in London planned for January 2006, where a new engagement between the international community and the Government of Afghanistan is also due to be completed.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank the delegation of Germany for having initiated and coordinated the draft resolution. We believe that the draft resolution performs an important function by highlighting the international community's assessment of the progress achieved in the political, security, economic, social and other critical spheres of Afghanistan's development and by drawing attention to the areas that require further attention. We have no objections to the plans of the coordinators of the draft resolution to merge its two parts, relating to peace and security and reconstruction and humanitarian issues, into one comprehensive draft resolution on the situation in Afghanistan for the sixty-first session of the General Assembly.

Just last week, on 23 November, Mr. M. R. Kutty, an employee of the Border Roads Organization of India, working on the construction of the Zaranj-Delaram road project in Afghanistan, was brutally murdered by his abductors. Mr. Kutty, along with three Afghan nationals, had been abducted on 19 November 2005 by the Taliban. We strongly condemn that inhuman and barbaric killing of an innocent person. The Taliban and its backers bear the responsibility for the consequences of that outrageous act. We hope that the perpetrators will be swiftly brought to justice. The Border Roads Organization of India is engaged in building a road in Afghanistan that is vital to its development and the welfare of its people. It is inconceivable that anybody should be opposed to it and threaten those working on it.

The recent escalation in violence, illustrated by the deaths of Mr. Kutty and other development and humanitarian personnel, underlines the continuing serious threat to Afghanistan's security and stability posed by remnants of Al-Qaida, Taliban and other terrorist and extremist elements. The report of the Secretary-General states that

> "Afghanistan today is suffering from a level of insecurity, especially in the south and parts of the east, not seen since the departure of the Taliban. The growing influence of non-Afghan elements in the security environment is of particular concern." (*A/60/224, para. 60*)

The Permanent Representative of Afghanistan rightly called that the main challenge to stability and development in Afghanistan.

There are clear signs that such elements continue to receive support and safe haven across the border from the southern and south-eastern provinces of Afghanistan. International responses to such destabilization are essential, but cannot be limited to combat operations on the ground. It is equally necessary to resolutely attack the financing, safe havens, training camps and networks that support them.

I may add that Afghanistan's historical tragedy was to be caught up in the great game in imperial times, which unfortunately continued, in different forms, through the cold war and then the struggle for the energy resources of Central Asia. Today, Afghan national consolidation is impeded by the collapse of the great game into a little game to dominate, again, the south and south-eastern edges of the chessboard. It is important therefore to ensure that international cooperation against Al-Qaida and the Taliban stays strategic and not be allowed to slip back into the temporary or the tactical.

The outcome document adopted by our heads of State and Government at the 2005 world summit calls upon States "to refrain from organizing, financing, encouraging, providing training for or otherwise supporting terrorist activities and to take appropriate measures to ensure that their territories are not used for such activities" (*resolution 60/1, para. 86*). The efficacy of cooperative multilateralism can, unfortunately, be tested only against the intentions of its weakest adherents.

India remains committed to the goal of a sovereign, stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan. Such an Afghanistan is necessary for peace, security and stability in the region. During the Prime Minister of India's recent visit to Afghanistan, he and President Hamid Karzai condemned global terrorism as a threat to democracy and declared that there could be no compromise with those who resort to terrorism. They reiterated their commitment to working together to ensure that Afghanistan would never again become a safe heaven for terrorism and extremism.

The *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005*, released earlier this month by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, registered a decrease in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan for the first time since 2001, with the area devoted to drug crops declining by an impressive 21 per cent. The decline in cultivation is important and encouraging and was a result of the compliance of Afghanistan's farmers with the Government's anti-cultivation messages or eradication policy. Unfortunately, Afghanistan's share of opium production continues to remain high. In 2005, Afghanistan contributed roughly 87 per cent of the world total.

India remains deeply concerned by the cultivation, production and trafficking of narcotic drugs in Afghanistan, and its links with criminal and terrorist networks. That phenomenon can only serve to undermine the political and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan and has potentially dangerous repercussions for the region and beyond. In response to a request from the United Kingdom, which is the lead country for tackling the drug problem in Afghanistan, India has agreed to contribute to the recently established Counter-Narcotics Trust Fund. We have also communicated our agreement to take up a pilot project on community development to wean farmers away from poppy cultivation.

India and Afghanistan enjoy traditional bonds of friendship, a shared history, many common traditions and enduring cultural ties. In the last three years, our bilateral relations have reached a new level of intensity and cooperation. In partnership with the Afghan Government, we have been able to implement a significant programme of reconstruction assistance. India's present commitments add up to over $550 million since 2002, placing it among the top six contributors to Afghanistan's reconstruction — a significant effort for a non-traditional donor. India has undertaken, in partnership with the Afghan Government, projects in a wide range of sectors, including hydroelectric power, road construction, agriculture, industry, telecommunications, information and broadcasting, education and health, which were identified by the Afghan Government as priority areas for development. In the next phase of our assistance programme, we plan to focus on undertaking community based, small-scale development projects that have a short gestation period with a direct, rapid and visible impact on community life.

Underlying our cooperation with Afghanistan is our desire to see Afghanistan emerge as a strong, united, independent and prosperous country. We wish

to see the full consolidation of authority by the central Government. Our efforts in reconstruction and other sectors are directed at promoting unity and reconciliation. During his visit to Afghanistan, the Prime Minister of India stated:

> "It is a privilege for India to be a partner in the path that Afghanistan has chosen, so I come back with a great sense of satisfaction that our two countries are working hand in hand to accelerate the tempo of social and economic development and to strengthen the democratic foundations of the polity of Afghanistan."

For those delegations that may be interested, we have placed outside the Hall a brochure and CD-ROM entitled "Rebuilding Afghanistan — India at Work", providing an overview of India's assistance to Afghanistan.

Mr. Ozawa (Japan): Our deliberations on this agenda item are very timely, especially since the results of the parliamentary and provincial council elections held on 18 September have just been confirmed. The success of the elections is a reassuring sign that Afghanistan has passed the final and most important milestone in its post-conflict transition and the completion of the Bonn process — the inauguration of a new Parliament.

As the Security Council has stressed in its presidential statement of last Wednesday, this remarkable achievement is a clear demonstration that the people of Afghanistan are strongly committed to freedom and democracy, and Japan, as the lead member country in the Security Council discussions on Afghanistan, welcomes that clear demonstration of will.

The challenges that remain for Afghanistan, however, are still considerable. We would like to stress three points in that connection.

First, on the importance of ownership, with the completion of the Bonn process, Afghanistan will turn a new page in its history and begin its nation-building as an independent, democratic State. We believe that it will be critically important in that new phase that Afghanistan continue to tackle the wide range of challenges facing the State and its people with a stronger sense and spirit of ownership. We therefore particularly commend the effort that the Afghans have put into finalizing the national development strategy as evidence of their national ownership.

In stressing national ownership, we should note two points. First, it is important that the international assistance and support that is made available be provided in a manner that respects and encourages such Afghan-owned efforts and Afghan-led processes. In that respect, support directed at institution-building and human resource development is most needed and is critically important. Secondly, Afghan ownership should not mean, nor should it be used as an excuse for, reducing the level of international assistance to Afghanistan. Assistance needs for reconstruction continue to be urgent and great. In particular, as the Afghan authorities have emphasized — and we agree with their assessment — community-based development and basic infrastructure are important areas that should receive high priority in the consolidation of peace in Afghanistan.

Japan is strongly committed to continuing its work in assisting the reconstruction of Afghanistan in the coming phases, in partnership with the Afghan authorities and communities and with other members of the international donor community.

We wish to stress that an appropriate post-Bonn framework of cooperation is essential in order to make the international community's support for and assistance to Afghanistan both adequate and coherent. We appreciate, in that connection, the initiative taken by the Governments of Afghanistan and the United Kingdom in hosting the London conference scheduled for January next year. An important discussion is now taking place concerning an Afghanistan compact. The compact — which is the expected outcome of the conference — will deal with such key issues as security, governance, economic and social development and counter-narcotics efforts. A proposal for an appropriate aid monitoring and coordination mechanism is also being discussed.

Japan will continue to participate actively in those discussions to achieve agreement on an effective post-Bonn framework of cooperation that will contribute to the attainment of our shared objectives. At the same time, we encourage the international community to accelerate its part of the work to establish the benchmarks that will be integral to the compact.

My third point relates to security. Despite the successful parliamentary and provincial council elections in September, the security situation in Afghanistan continues to be a source of serious concern, as shown once again by the recent attacks against the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). There is a clear danger that continued insecurity will undermine the reconstruction and development process. The international community, therefore, must not reduce its commitment in the political and security fields after the completion of the Bonn process. Japan, for its part, has taken the steps necessary to ensure the continuation of the activities of the vessels of its Self-Defence Forces that are providing sea-based support for the Operation Enduring Freedom coalition, which, together with ISAF, is helping to improve security in Afghanistan.

We reiterate, however, our firm belief that primary responsibility for ensuring security lies with the Afghans, reflecting Afghan ownership. That will require determined effort on their part to advance security sector reform. As the lead nation in assisting the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in Afghanistan, Japan welcomes the completion of disarmament and demobilization there. We consider that feat to be one of the most successful and most comprehensive examples of such undertakings in recent post-conflict situations throughout the world.

Efforts clearly need to be redoubled, however, in the area of security sector reform. Such efforts should include the reintegration of disarmed soldiers, the strengthening of the Afghan security forces and the further disbanding of the illegal armed groups. In that connection, it is important to recognize that there is a link between the disbanding process and other efforts such as justice sector reform, counter-narcotics activities and community development. Needless to say, adequate coordination of efforts is needed in order to produce tangible results in this key area.

Finally, we wish to express our great appreciation to the delegation of Germany for submitting the draft resolution. It incorporates the thinking of my Government on the way forward for the post-Bonn process in Afghanistan. As a sponsor of the draft, we strongly support it.

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland): I am taking the floor briefly to express Iceland's continuing support for the rebuilding of Afghanistan. As in previous years, Iceland is a sponsor of the draft resolution on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security and on emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan.

Nearly four years after the signing of the historic Bonn Agreement, we have seen the conclusion of the political process envisaged in it. The parliamentary and provincial elections held on 18 September — the first in Afghanistan in more than 30 years — marked important steps on Afghanistan's road to recovery, peace and stability. We commend all parties involved for their role in organizing and securing the elections. We congratulate the people of Afghanistan on the confirmation of the final results and on the newly elected representatives who will take their seats in the House of the People next month. In particular, we would like to congratulate the Afghan women who have been elected. Full participation by Afghan women in every aspect of the political system — as well as in the civil, economic and social life of the country — must be a priority.

With international assistance, Afghanistan has made substantial progress towards stability. However, the democratic elections were held in a persistently unstable security environment. I agree with what the Ambassador of India said a few minutes ago about the grave security situation. We condemn attacks in Afghanistan against civilians and international staff that are intended to disrupt the democratic process. In that connection, we deplore the fact that Afghanistan has become more dependent on narcotics production and trafficking in drugs. Indeed, in the draft resolution before us, the General Assembly expresses its deep concerns about that development.

Iceland will continue to help the Afghan people — including through the International Security Assistance Force — in their reconstruction and their efforts to re-establish normalcy, in a manner compatible with requirements concerning the security of its civilian peacekeepers.

I agree with what the Ambassador of Japan just stated regarding the importance of Afghan national ownership. However, Afghanistan continues to need comprehensive and coordinated international support to enable it to take its place as a full member of the

international community. Iceland intends to continue to play its role in that respect.

Ms. Juul (Norway): Norway welcomes the successful holding of the parliamentary and provincial elections in Afghanistan. Another milestone has been passed. The institutional foundations of democracy are growing stronger. It is particularly encouraging to see the ethnic, ideological and professional diversity of the elected representatives, as well as the strong representation of women.

The long-term commitment of the international community to the further development of Afghanistan is still of vital importance. As the recent elections represented the last milestone in the Bonn process, it is now important to establish a solid framework for the work ahead. Norway looks forward to discussing the way forward with the Afghan authorities and the international community in London in January. The United Nations has played an important role in the Bonn process, and we hope that it will continue to do so in the next stage.

The fragile security situation still poses a threat to stability and development. Competent and efficient armed forces, police and judiciary are needed to meet the security challenge. Afghan ownership of those processes is essential. At the same time, the international community must continue to provide substantial support for security sector reform. Norway is increasing its assistance in the training of Afghan police officers under the German-led police project. We are also providing legal advice in the fight against the production of illegal drugs.

The security situation shows that the assistance of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is still needed. ISAF is expanding its area of operation. Norway's priorities are in close keeping with NATO's policy. We remain committed to maintaining a military presence in Afghanistan through our contribution to ISAF in Kabul and our leadership of the provincial reconstruction team in Meymaneh, in northern Afghanistan. We are increasing our contribution to ISAF, and at NATO's request we are now in the process of providing F-16 air support.

The illegal drug economy is also a great challenge. The Afghan Government, in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, has taken important steps this year in reducing opium poppy cultivation. Norway appreciates the leadership that the United Kingdom has assumed in the fight against the drug economy in Afghanistan, and will continue to provide assistance in those efforts. We must take a multidimensional and coherent approach that promotes alternative livelihoods, law enforcement and information activities. Putting pressure on the poppy farmers in Afghanistan alone will not solve the problem. The less we alienate the Afghan population in the fight against drugs, the better. We must follow up our promises with regard to alternative livelihoods. Norway is increasing its support for counter-narcotic initiatives in Afghanistan. Combating the illegal drug economy should be a top priority for us all.

This year again, there have been a number of attacks on civilians, including United Nations humanitarian aid workers. The targeting of humanitarian personnel in a conflict is unacceptable. A concerted effort is needed to reverse a trend that runs counter to the most basic tenets of international humanitarian law.

Afghan ownership of development activity is vital. The priorities of development efforts, including those of the provincial reconstruction teams, must be aligned with those of the Afghan Government. Transparent planning and priority-setting should also take place at the local level. Local authorities must be empowered so that they are better able to provide basic services and long-term development. That is a matter of clarifying the provincial authorities' roles and responsibilities and of ensuring the necessary funding. When local democratic institutions with clear roles and responsibilities have been established and empowered to address the needs, the platform for development will be in place.

Afghanistan is facing a legacy of human rights violations committed over more than two decades of armed conflict. Justice, peace and democracy are not mutually exclusive objectives, but reinforcing imperatives. To build sustainable peace and stability, the people of Afghanistan have to come to terms with large-scale past abuses. There must be reconciliation between victims, perpetrators and other stakeholders. Therefore, a proper transitional justice strategy aimed at peacebuilding and reconciliation will need to extend far beyond the courts. A functional and unimpeachable juridical system is key. That may prove to be the most complex task of all. We applaud the efforts led by Italy in that regard.

Norway welcomes the progress made in the human rights field and the work of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Both the Commission's report, entitled *A Call for Justice*, and the action plan Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in Afghanistan are important steps forward. The action plan acknowledges that any mechanism for building peace and justice must be carried out with the active and meaningful participation of all national stakeholders. Soon, a new human rights commission will be appointed. It is important to ensure that the appointment process be in line with the Paris Principles and that the future commission be independent, professional and efficient.

However, more remains to be done. The main responsibility for continuing the efforts to address human rights issues, including transitional justice, lies with the Government. Women must be allowed to participate in all aspects of the reconstruction and peacebuilding processes. The various provisions of the Constitution must be reflected in all legislation and judicial practice. Recent developments with regard to freedom of speech give cause for concern. Fundamental human rights must be a pillar upon which the Afghan justice system is built.

Afghanistan is one of the major recipients of Norwegian assistance and one of our partner countries in development cooperation. Norway is a strong supporter of joint financing mechanisms with a view to strengthening Afghan ownership and improving donor coordination. Afghan leadership can be achieved only by strengthening the Government, not by sidelining it.

We welcome the work being done by the Afghan authorities to prepare the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the Afghanistan Compact document. That work will form the basis for the discussions in London on the way forward for Afghanistan and future international assistance. We look forward to taking part in those discussions and to reiterating our strong commitment to Afghanistan. Our assistance to Afghanistan has a long-term perspective.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to extend our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his informative and comprehensive report and for his unwavering commitment, as well as for the central role that he and his Special Representative continue to play for the consolidation of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The holding of the parliamentary and provincial council elections on 18 September, which led to the completion of the Bonn process, was yet another occasion on which the Afghan people demonstrated their firm commitment to a stable and democratic future for their country.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan highlights a number of promising improvements in the economic and social fields. Moreover, encouraging progress has been reported with regard to the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Afghanistan has also witnessed the development of its new professional national army and police. Those developments, coupled with the progress made in the creation of a new justice system and the adoption of the first report on the Millennium Development Goals by the Government of Afghanistan, are reasons to be confident that the country is moving in the right direction. They also indicate a growing ownership of the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts of the Government of Afghanistan, which needs to expand that national ownership to all fields of governance in the country.

Despite those impressive accomplishments, much remains to be done. The security situation in Afghanistan and the threat posed by opium production and drug trafficking continue to be of grave concern. Increased terrorist attacks and violence by Al-Qaida and the Taliban, coupled with a pervasive drug economy, have created alarming challenges that seriously undermine the security and thus hamper the reconstruction of the country.

The continuation of acts of violence and intimidation directed against development, humanitarian and United Nations personnel is another issue of grave concern which needs to be thoroughly tackled. The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns the continued heinous terrorist acts committed in Afghanistan and extends its full support to the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to improve the security situation in the country.

The cultivation and production of, and trafficking in, narcotic drugs in Afghanistan, which adversely affect the political and economic reconstruction of the country and undermine the stability and security of the larger region, especially neighbouring countries, continue unabated. Afghanistan remains the world's

largest supplier of opium, producing 87 per cent of the world's opium.

There are abundant reasons to believe that production of and trafficking in narcotic drugs underpin the other threats which contribute to the insecurity in Afghanistan, namely terrorism, organized crime and most other violent and criminal activities. Therefore, combating this problem should be high on the agenda of the Afghan Government and the international community in all efforts and initiatives to address the country's security and reconstruction challenges.

We have welcomed and firmly supported the valuable and sincere steps that the Afghan Government has thus far taken to contain the threat of narcotic drugs. Nevertheless, we concur with the Secretary-General that combating this menace will require long-term planning and a multifaceted strategy, developed by Afghanistan and implemented in close cooperation with the international community. We further believe that the countries with the widest military presence in Afghanistan have a special responsibility to prevent and counter this menace.

Moreover, while certain efforts by the Government of Afghanistan have resulted in the reduction of opium cultivation in some regions traditionally famous for opium production, opium cultivation has increased in the regions bordering my country, especially in the Farah province. As a matter of fact, despite our costly campaign, we have witnessed an increase in the drug trafficking in Iran emanating from Afghanistan over the past year.

We are of the view that the best way out of the situation created by this menace lies mostly in accelerating the pace of the Afghanistan's reconstruction in all fields, since opium cultivation has become a major source of income for many Afghan farmers. Accordingly, the international community should also redouble its efforts in providing assistance for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, for its part, is playing its role in that regard. Iran has been engaged in various infrastructure activities in Afghanistan, including in road construction, manpower training, electricity projects, humanitarian services and many other projects.

Furthermore, Iran has borne huge costs over the past three decades as a result of hosting almost 3 million Afghan refugees. We earnestly hope that the new conditions in Afghanistan will facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees to their home country in a more promising manner. We believe that the timely and full implementation of the trilateral agreement signed between Iran, Afghanistan and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as other respective arrangements, are imperative to help bring about a meaningful and dignified repatriation of Afghan refugees to their homeland. Iran stands ready to fully cooperate with the Government of Afghanistan and the international community towards reaching this objective.

The Afghan people and Government are now heading towards yet another major chapter in the history of their country, namely the post-Bonn process. The international community, with the United Nations at its forefront, should continue its support to the Government and people of Afghanistan in a coordinated manner, and my Government stands ready to provide its unreserved cooperation in that regard.

We welcome and support the key principles set out in the recent report of the Secretary-General for cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community during the post-Bonn process, including the leadership role of Afghanistan in the reconstruction process, the just allocation of domestic and international reconstruction resources across the country, regional cooperation, lasting capacity- and institution-building, combating corruption, promotion of transparency and accountability, public information and participation, and the continued central role of the United Nations.

We believe that combating narcotic drugs as well as the safe, orderly and voluntary return of refugees are two other key elements of equal importance which need to be incorporated.

I cannot conclude without reiterating the unwavering resolve of my country to continue to help the Afghan Government and people in their endeavours to overcome the daunting challenges ahead. In that context, my delegation has joined the sponsors of the draft resolution contained in document A/60/L.27.

Mr. Rock (Canada): Canada is pleased to have this opportunity to address the General Assembly on

the situation in Afghanistan and also to express our thanks to the Secretary-General for his most recent report.

The report duly acknowledges the significant progress that Afghanistan has made. It underlines the sound and productive partnership that has developed between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community, with the United Nations playing a central role. It also gives due credit to the people of Afghanistan, who time and again, throughout the last difficult years, have shown their courage, perhaps most recently by the simple act of casting their ballots in an election.

But the steady progress made to date is no grounds for complacency. Building the infrastructure of a State with the capacity to govern takes time, and all of us must redouble our efforts. Canada is committed to staying the course. We are very proud to work in partnership with the people of Afghanistan and its many allies. Canada's engagement in Afghanistan draws on resources and expertise from across the whole of our Government, with a particular focus on defence, diplomacy and development.

Canada is playing a significant role in southern Afghanistan. We have already established a multi-disciplinary Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar. In February 2006 — just two months from now — Canada will deploy a task force and brigade headquarters to Kandahar, bringing the number of Canadian personnel in southern Afghanistan to almost 2,000. Canadians are fully aware that these commitments are not made without considerable sacrifice. We were saddened just this past week at the death of one of our servicemen in Kandahar.

But we remain committed. The rebuilding of Afghanistan is now entering a new phase. It is time to consolidate our gains and chart the path ahead. In that context, permit me briefly to address two issues: first, the development and implementation of new benchmarks for progress; and, secondly, strengthening our commitment to the pursuit of justice.

On the first point, the Government of Afghanistan is itself leading the process of developing a new compact with the international community, setting out benchmarks and reciprocal commitments. Canada supports the development of that Afghanistan compact and the national development strategy as essential tools for ensuring forward momentum. We welcome the identification of security, governance and development as main themes of the agreement, with counter-narcotics being addressed as an issue that cuts across all the others.

We will be actively involved in the ongoing discussions in preparation for the London conference early next year at which the compact and the strategy will be launched.

Another important upcoming conference is the regional economic cooperation conference to be held in Kabul next month. Afghanistan's neighbours are obviously key to the country's future stability and prosperity. We encourage Afghanistan's regional partners to participate fully in the conference, to identify concrete areas in which to expand cooperation and to assume greater responsibility in promoting security.

(spoke in French)

My second point concerns our commitment to justice. We must all work together to ensure that those who want to destabilize Afghanistan, those who resort to violence to impede progress, those who are involved in illicit activities and those who do not respect human rights or who violate international humanitarian law — particularly by attacking aid workers — are dealt with appropriately. To that end, measures must be taken at several levels, utilizing not only the Afghan security forces, but also non-military means. That includes creating an effective justice structure and implementing a multifaceted strategy for transitional justice.

From that perspective, Canada supports the work being carried out by the Afghan authorities, in close cooperation with the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, to develop a national transitional justice strategy. We are pleased to note that the draft strategy envisages a broad spectrum of mechanisms for addressing past injustices, ranging from a detailed assessment of the civil service to the ending of impunity. It is clear that in Afghanistan, as elsewhere, justice is a precondition for lasting peace.

(spoke in English)

I should now like to say a final word about the United Nations, which plays a central role in consolidating a sustainable peace in Afghanistan. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan must be endowed with the requisite capacity and

support to carry out its mandate in a complex, evolving environment. That includes ensuring that resources are in place to support the post-Bonn Afghanistan compact and national development strategy, including monitoring and coordination efforts. Canada stands ready to assist in any way it can. We look forward to the upcoming discussion in London.

I close by reaffirming the strong commitment of Canada and its people to a prosperous and stable future for Afghanistan.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I make this statement on behalf of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As a close neighbour of the SCO, Afghanistan enjoys friendly relations with SCO members. Changes and evolution in the Afghan situation are closely related to the region in which the SCO is located.

SCO members have been closely following the process of peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan, and we are pleased to see that positive progress has been made in that process. Politically, Afghanistan has promulgated a new constitution and has held successful presidential and parliamentary elections, laying a political foundation for its stability. Economically, the country is committed to post-war reconstruction, effectively using international assistance and tapping its own resources. Last year, it achieved an impressive economic growth rate of 20 per cent. In the security area, the Afghan National Army and police forces are smoothly being established. They have started to assume local security responsibilities independently and have also made important efforts to fight terrorism and narcotics. In the area of foreign relations, Afghanistan has successfully completed the Bonn process by seeking international cooperation. It also attaches importance to developing friendly relations and cooperation with its neighbours. SCO members would like to congratulate the Afghan Government and people on those achievements.

On the other hand, Afghanistan is still facing quite a number of pressing problems. Its security situation is still not completely stable. Its economic reconstruction remains a long-term and arduous task. There is still no obvious improvement in the handling of such issues as narcotics production and trafficking. We are seriously concerned at the significant increase in the number of terrorist activities carried out by the Taliban and other extremists in recent months.

The SCO believes that if Afghanistan is to achieve lasting peace and order and comprehensive progress in social and economic efforts, it must first maintain stability and promote development. We hope for a stable Afghanistan that is free of terrorism, war, narcotics and poverty. National reconciliation will be crucial in the achievement of a long-term comprehensive settlement of the Afghan conflict.

Secondly, it is important that Afghanistan build a friendly and cooperative neighbouring environment and that it maintain friendly relations and cooperate extensively with its neighbours, within the framework of the Kabul Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations of 22 December 2002, for mutual benefit and win-win results.

Thirdly, it is essential that Afghanistan continue to seek support and assistance from the international community, led by the United Nations.

The SCO believes that peace, stability and development in Afghanistan serve not only the interests of the Afghan people, but also the common interests of all countries in the region and throughout the world. The international community should respect the State sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan, as well as the Afghan people's independent choice of their social system and mode of development, and should not interfere in their internal affairs, so as to create favourable external conditions for the social and economic development of the country. The international alliance against terrorism should cooperate closely with the Afghan Government, acting within the mandate of the Security Council and with the consent of the legitimate authorities of Afghanistan.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization supports the provision of extensive international humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people and has made important contributions to that end. For example, in 2002, the Chinese Government pledged an aid package worth $150 million to assist the Afghan Government in post-war reconstruction. The grants portion of the aid package will be fully delivered next year. In November 2002, China wrote off all the mature debts — totalling £9.607 million — owed to it by Afghanistan. The Russian Federation also provides assistance to Afghanistan through various channels. In particular, Russia's Ministry of Defence, during the period 2002-2005, provided Afghanistan with vehicles and other

military equipment worth a total of $200 million. Russia also delivers significant humanitarian assistance.

In the future, SCO members will continue to do what they can to provide Afghanistan with assistance and to encourage their business people to take an active part in the post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan. As stated in the Declaration of the SCO summit meeting held in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 5 July 2005, the SCO is prepared to engage in exchanges and cooperation with Afghanistan in areas of mutual interest.

In that context, it should be recalled that countering the production and proliferation of drugs remains one of the key elements in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. The most effective strategy would provide tight control over Afghanistan's borders with neighbouring countries by strengthening existing and establishing new anti-drug security zones.

In June 2004, President Karzai, head of the Afghan Interim Government, attended the SCO Tashkent Summit as an invited guest. It was decided at the Summit that an SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group should be established to enhance cooperation. Early this month in Beijing, the SCO and Afghanistan officially signed a protocol establishing the Contact Group. According to the protocol, the two sides will hold consultations on a regular basis to promote bilateral cooperation. That will create new and favourable conditions for effective cooperation between SCO members and Afghanistan.

We believe that the role played by the United Nations in Afghan affairs following the completion of the Bonn process should include, in particular, the coordination of the international community's peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts there. The specific structure of a future United Nations presence remains to be determined, but it must involve Afghans themselves and take into account the country's real needs. SCO members will make constructive contributions in the context of relevant efforts.

We are confident that, under the leadership of President Karzai and the Afghan Government, and with the unremitting efforts of the Afghan people and the vigorous assistance of the international community, Afghanistan will make even greater progress in economic reconstruction and social development. The SCO stands ready to participate actively in that process and will work tirelessly to that end.

We support the draft resolution on Afghanistan, which was prepared by a broad group of sponsors and drafted by Germany. Its adoption by consensus would help to enhance the concerted efforts of the international community in Afghanistan.

Mr. Al-Enezi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to express our gratitude and appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his valuable report contained in document A/60/224, which reviews the recent United Nations activities in Afghanistan and examines in detail the efforts made by the Organization and its personnel in implementing the humanitarian missions entrusted to them under the relevant United Nations resolutions. We also welcome the efforts made by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Mr. Jean Arnault, in the context of the reconstruction of Afghanistan's infrastructure and the restoration of security and stability in the country.

The State of Kuwait would like to congratulate the Afghan people on the confirmation of the final results of the parliamentary and provincial council elections. The success of those elections is a testimony to the commitment of the Afghan voters to democracy and freedom in their country. The confirmation of the results paves the way for the investiture of a new parliament at the proper time and, consequently, for the conclusion of the Bonn political process.

The persistence of war for more than two decades has led to grave losses at all levels in Afghanistan. The wars led to the collapse of the financial and banking system and to the destruction of infrastructure for transportation, telecommunications, electricity, water, education and healthcare, as well as to the deterioration of the agricultural sector, which resulted in severe shortages in the basic food supply. The implementation of all of Afghanistan's reconstruction programmes is therefore of cardinal importance, as it will contribute to meeting the basic requirements for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their towns and villages. The implementation of those programmes would also strengthen efforts to restore security and stability in Afghanistan in particular and in the region in general.

Kuwait would like to emphasize the importance of ensuring that the international community remains highly motivated and committed to assisting Afghanistan as it confronts the remaining challenges,

especially acts of terrorism and other threats to its security, bringing perpetrators of such acts to justice. Kuwait also condemns categorically the most recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, notably those against the International Security Assistance Force. Kuwait expresses its condolences to the families of all of the victims of those attacks.

Kuwait would also like to stress the importance of rebuilding the Afghan armed forces, reforming the judicial institutions and suppressing all illicit armed groups with a view to enabling the Afghan Government to take control of the situation and to make progress in the political process. Kuwait also supports the Afghan Government's efforts to fight the illicit trade in narcotic drugs, and calls upon the international community to enhance and strengthen programmes for eradicating the planting and production of opium.

At the economic level, Kuwait has taken many steps to assist in restoring security and stability and the infrastructure in Afghanistan. The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has granted a $30 million loan in accordance with the pledge made by Kuwait at the Tokyo donors conference. Half of that loan was used in the reconstruction of the highway linking Kandahar to Spin Buldak. The remaining $15 million went to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. Since 2000, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society has made cash donations exceeding $6.5 million. Various charitable associations and committees are also continuing to provide assistance.

In conclusion, Kuwait hopes that our international Organization will continue its efforts to provide assistance to the Afghan Government with a view to restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan. Such assistance would have a positive impact on regional environment and would help Afghanistan to resume its proper place in the international community.

Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea): At the outset, my delegation congratulates the Government and the people of Afghanistan on the successful holding of parliamentary and provincial elections in September, which demonstrated their firm determination to achieve democracy, reconciliation and unity. We look forward to the establishment of the new parliament and the completion of the political process agreed upon in Bonn four years ago.

Alongside that political accomplishment, progress has been made in rebuilding Afghanistan's security sector. The disarmament and demobilization programmes have been completed, and the reintegration programme is being implemented vigorously. In addition, a great number of new national army soldiers and police officers have been trained. Also notable are the high economic growth rates in Afghanistan's urban centres over the past three and a half years.

Nevertheless, there are still many challenges to lasting stability and sustainable development. As is widely recognized, the two most important issues are security and drugs.

There is an urgent and critical need to ensure security in all parts of Afghanistan. In that regard, the Republic of Korea is deeply concerned about the recent deterioration of security in some areas of the country. There are still 1,800 illegal armed groups operating in Afghanistan, and violence has increased over the last several months. Furthermore, the insurgency has taken a more brutal turn of late, using more sophisticated weaponry, as seen in the recent suicide bombing attacks. In order to counter that trend and create a more secure environment, the ongoing reintegration programme must be accelerated, the remaining illegal armed groups must be disbanded, and the Afghan national army and police forces must be strengthened in both quality and quantity.

As for the issue of drugs, we welcome the counter-narcotics measures recently taken by Kabul, which helped to reduce opium cultivation this year. However, the large-scale production and trafficking of narcotic drugs remain a serious concern. We encourage the Afghan Government, in close cooperation with the international community, to step up its efforts to eradicate narcotics.

The successful elections in September and the conclusion of the Bonn process offer Afghanistan a historic opportunity for transition from decades of war and poverty to peace and prosperity. At this critical time, and considering the ongoing challenges that Afghanistan faces, the international community's engagement with the country needs to continue beyond the Bonn process. In that regard, we welcome the international conference on Afghanistan to be held in London early next year.

The Republic of Korea, having actively supported the stability and reconstruction of Afghanistan, is once again a sponsor of the draft resolution before us. Korea

has continued with its commitment, providing medical and reconstruction units to Afghanistan since 2002 and contributing $57 million since 2001 for emergency relief, reconstruction and support of the elections held in September. We would like to reaffirm our unwavering support for the Government and people of Afghanistan in their efforts to create a future full of hope and promise.

Mr. Rachmianto (Indonesia): Indonesia is pleased to address the Assembly on the situation in Afghanistan, and my delegation would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on that very important matter.

The report provides us with a clear understanding of the political process in Afghanistan in general, particularly with reference to the implementation of the Bonn Agreement. On the whole, we are gratified that general progress is being made, although not at a uniform pace. While we note the progress made in the institution-building process at the central Government level, we recognize that some difficulties continue to be a challenge, particularly at the provincial and district levels.

Similarly, efforts to reform security sector institutions have yet to enjoy a reassuring degree of success. The security situation is particularly disturbing, with an increase in the sophistication of weapons used and in the type of attacks being carried out by insurgents and anti-Government elements in some parts of the country.

Other areas of critical concern include the cultivation of and trade in narcotics. That issue continues to imperil the establishment of the rule of law and effective governance in Afghanistan, despite the best efforts of the country's counter-narcotic authorities. We share the view that this menace must be brought under control in order to protect the fragile democratization and the success of State-building in Afghanistan.

Despite all that, we are pleased at the successful completion of various efforts that have been undertaken by the Afghan Government, such as the disarmament and demobilization components of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme; the progress of the Afghan national army, which was due to reach its target strength of 43,000 ahead of schedule by September 2007; the training of over 40,000 police officers and the proposed major police reform; and the work of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, which is reported to be having a significant positive impact on the protection and promotion of human rights in the country.

It is against that background that Afghanistan held general elections last September to choose a National Assembly and local councils for the country's 34 provinces. Only last week, the final results of the parliamentary and provincial council elections were confirmed. They pave the way for the timely inauguration of the new Parliament and the conclusion of Afghanistan's transitional political phase. In that regard, my delegation is pleased at the successful outcome of the election process and calls on the international community to remain engaged and committed to helping Afghanistan to address the remaining challenges in other areas.

While my delegation is gratified by the successful conclusions of the elections of the Wolesi Jirga, we look forward to the constitutional and prompt filling of positions in the house of elders, or Meshrano Jirga. We further look forward to the consultations to be initiated by the Secretary-General with the Government of Afghanistan and other relevant institutions towards determining the political way forward. In the interim, we call for continued cooperation and commitment by the international community in support of the Afghan Government and people.

In that context, Indonesia has become a sponsor of the draft resolution contained in document A/60/L.27, which we hope can be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Norzuhdy (Malaysia): My delegation is pleased to participate in this debate concerning Afghanistan. We wish to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the situation in Afghanistan, as contained in document A/60/224.

My delegation joins others in congratulating the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan people on the remarkable progress they have achieved since the Bonn Agreement of December 2001. We commend the recent confirmation of the final results of the parliamentary and provincial council elections held on 18 September 2005, and regard it as paving the way towards the timely inauguration of the new Parliament and the conclusion of the Bonn political process. We believe that the successful completion of those

elections has demonstrated the broad commitment of Afghan voters to a democratic future for their country. We reiterate our appreciation to all those who contributed to the electoral process, especially to the Joint Electoral Management Body and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, for their dedication and valuable work, and to the international community, including neighbouring countries, for providing security assistance, funds, election personnel and observers. In that regard, Malaysia applauds the Afghan people for having taken those brave steps and calls on them to remain fully committed to rebuilding their country and to strengthening the foundation of a constitutional democracy. We urge them to reassume their rightful place in the community of nations.

While we applaud their achievements, Malaysia recognizes the urgent need to tackle the remaining challenges, including security, narcotics, strengthening the rule of law and justice sector reform, human rights and economic and social developments. My delegation is concerned that failure to effectively confront those challenges could undermine the newly created political institutions and present serious obstacles to the full recovery of Afghanistan.

In that respect, Malaysia calls on the international community to fully support the Government and people of Afghanistan, as they work to build on their achievements, to underpin their freedom and enhance their security, to complete the transition to the rule of law, to accelerate the pace and scope of human and economic development and to eliminate their dependence on the illicit drugs economy.

My delegation recognizes that the continued and sustained support of the international community is essential for the implementation of a robust development strategy that could benefit all Afghans in their endeavours to overcome the remaining challenges. In that context, Malaysia stands ready to cooperate and will continue to provide technical assistance and training programmes to Afghanistan under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP) aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Afghan people in their endeavours towards nation-building.

Malaysia notes with concern that the cultivation, sale and trafficking of illegal narcotics poses a significant threat not only to the long-term security and stability of Afghanistan, but also to its neighbouring countries and the world at large. It has been widely acknowledged that narcotics are a threat to national security, social stability and health, and could impact on governmental effectiveness. My delegation is concerned that, despite the efforts to address the problem, Afghanistan remains the largest opium producer in the world, providing nearly 87 per cent of the world's total supply.

Although the recent report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime noted some progress in cutting back opium poppy cultivation, Afghanistan risks becoming a narco-State. In that regard, my delegation endorses and supports the 2005 counter-narcotics implementation plan as the basis for making progress towards a drug-free Afghanistan.

We also endorse the efforts made by the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to end poppy cultivation, to build relevant judicial and police capacity and to provide sustainable alternative livelihoods for those engaged in poppy cultivation. We call on the international community to provide assistance in that regard.

As security remains essential for long-term reconstruction and development in Afghanistan, my delegation welcomes the progress made in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of militia forces, and recognizes the particular challenges associated with the disbandment of illegal armed groups in Afghanistan. Progress has been manifested in the improved political environment during the recent elections and the creation of the Afghan National Army, which ensures that military assets and weaponry are in the hands of the State and are to be used only in the protection of national sovereignty.

Although the elections themselves were largely peaceful, my delegation noted the large number of attacks on security forces and Afghan citizens in recent months. An ambush in Helmand province on 10 October killed 18 Afghan policemen. Earlier, four Afghan policemen were accidentally and mistakenly killed by troops of a particular country. Suicide bomb attacks were also on the rise. In early October an assault on a British embassy convoy near Kandahar wounded several people, while a suicide bomber drove into a Canadian army convoy a week earlier and killed one Afghan. In September, a man wearing a military uniform blew himself up near an army centre, killing nine people.

While we unequivocally condemned all such attacks in Afghanistan, including the attacks against the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and expressed our deepest sympathies and condolences to the victims, we also expressed our disgust and abhorrence over the video showing the burning of the remains of alleged Taliban fighters by troops of a particular country. Such controversy, including the alleged abuses of human rights of detainees, does not bode well for the efforts of the international community to assist the Government of Afghanistan to secure and stabilize the country.

My delegation endorses the key principles of cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community underlining the post-Bonn process, and as set out in the Secretary-General's report. We support the central and impartial role the United Nations plays towards the consolidation of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

While we welcome the readiness of the Government of Afghanistan to prepare an interim national development strategy, which is to be considered at a conference in London planned for January 2006, we wish to urge the international community to support that process and to contribute generously to Afghanistan's development effort. Such support will go a long way in achieving growth through rebuilding infrastructure, developing human and institutional capacity and supporting community-based development. That process will define our mutual commitment and will provide a framework by which we can measure that implementation over the coming years.

In our capacity as the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Malaysia wishes to emphasize and reiterate its commitment and the commitment of other NAM members towards Afghanistan's development, as reflected in the Final Document of the XIII NAM Summit in Kuala Lumpur in February 2003.

Afghanistan has made great strides in its efforts towards nation-building. However, more could be done in the area of reconstruction, and in particular in removing obstacles to private sector investment. In that regard, efforts by the United Nations, the international community and Afghanistan's neighbours need to be further enhanced. On that note, my delegation is pleased to join the other delegations in co-sponsoring the draft resolution on the important question that has been introduced by the Permanent Representative of Germany.

Mr. Southcott (Australia): Australia congratulates the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan people on the achievements made since the Bonn Agreement of December 2001. Australia also warmly welcomes the democratic outcome of the September 2005 national and provincial elections and applauds the courage shown by all Afghans who took part, as candidates and as voters. It is particularly gratifying to see the large number of women candidates who were successful in gaining election as Members of Parliament, reportedly yielding one of the highest proportions of female parliamentarians in the world.

Australia and Afghanistan share warm relations and a long historical association. Afghan cameleers first came to Australia in the 1860s and were instrumental in opening up the vast, dry Australian interior for trans-continental trade and transport. Diplomatic relations were established in 1969 and recent waves of immigration show that Afghans are finding refuge in Australia from the violence that has wracked their recent history.

Almost a quarter of a century of conflict and civil war has undermined the state structure in Afghanistan and made it a breeding ground for instability and terrorism. Recent history has shown us that States weakened by conflict should not, and cannot, be considered a localized problem or one distant from our respective borders. In our common interest of international peace and security, the United Nations and its Member countries have a pivotal role to play in assisting with the construction of secure, stable and economically viable States.

Australia remains concerned about the damage done in Afghanistan by years of conflict. Particularly disturbing are the reports of a recent upswing in violence in the south of the country and indications that remnant Taliban and other extremist forces are reorganizing, as clearly indicated by the United Nations Secretary-General in his report to the Security Council on Afghanistan of 12 August 2005 (*A/60/224*). The report states that Afghanistan is suffering from a level of insecurity, particularly in the south and parts of the east, not seen since the departure of the Taliban. There has been an increase, between May 2004 and May 2005, in attacks on Afghan civilians and members

of the Afghan and international security forces, with the resulting increased rate of injury and loss of life.

The reconstruction effort is of vital importance for the people of Afghanistan and provides the vehicle by which the cycles of poverty, lawlessness and violence can be broken. We welcome the May 2005 Joint Declaration of the United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership, the Joint Declaration of an Enduring Relationship between the United Kingdom and Afghanistan; and the 16 November European Union-Afghanistan Joint Declaration: Committing to a new EU-Afghan Partnership, as important statements of long-term commitment of major partners.

Australia, too, has demonstrated its willingness to assist and is committed to the longer-term rebuilding of Afghanistan. For example, between 2001 and today, Australia has pledged a total of $110 million in development assistance to Afghanistan. Australia estimates that in 2005-2006 up to $26 million in assistance will be provided. Australian assistance focuses on vital areas of rebuilding: support for the return and reintegration of refugee and displaced Afghans, meeting humanitarian needs, and building capacity to manage a successful transition to a democratic Government. Priorities will include supporting delivery of essential services through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, and support to improve food security and rural livelihoods, health and education. Australia also supports the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission and the Independent Electoral Commission.

Australian military personnel served with distinction in Afghanistan in 2001-2002 as part of the first efforts to reintroduce democracy for the Afghan people. In July this year, Prime Minister John Howard announced that Australia would again provide military assistance, by sending a special operations task group to Afghanistan in September 2005 for a period of one year. The task group of 190 personnel is helping to improve security in Afghanistan. Importantly, this included contributing to the provision of a stable environment in which to hold Afghanistan's first parliamentary elections in over 30 years, on 18 September 2005. The Australian Government is currently considering the possible deployment in 2006 of up to 200 additional Australian Defence Force personnel as a contribution to a Provincial Reconstruction Team under the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.

Australia remains concerned at the high levels and pervasiveness of opium production in Afghanistan. The sale of that illicit drug funds anti-Kabul forces, which presents a challenge to the central Government and poses a danger to the people. A stable and viable Afghanistan will not be possible until the vexed issue of opium production is addressed and this source of chronic instability, corruption and misery is removed from the fabric of Afghan life.

To overcome the many challenges still present, Afghanistan requires support from its immediate neighbours. Afghanistan is important to the stability of the regions in which it has a pivotal place: South and Central Asia, and the Middle East. We welcome the December 2002 Kabul Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations and are encouraged by the efforts of neighbouring States to work cooperatively with Afghanistan to solve the pressing domestic and transnational problems which threaten to further destabilize the country.

Afghanistan requires ongoing international support. We look to the London conference in January 2006 to provide the necessary planning frameworks, benchmarks and strategic direction for the future rebuilding of Afghanistan. It also provides the opportunity for the newly elected Afghan Government to clearly put forth its aspirations and ideas on behalf of all the Afghan people. Australia looks to play a constructive role in a new "Compact for Afghanistan" and remains committed to international efforts for the rebuilding of that country.

Australia will continue to support Afghanistan's transition from conflict to peace and democracy.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

United Nations A/60/PV.57

General Assembly
Sixtieth session

Official Records

57th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 29 November 2005, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 15

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/60/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/539)

Draft resolutions (A/60/L.28, A/60/L.29, A/60/L.30 and A/60/L.31)

The President: This morning, I had the honour to address the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I recalled the United Nations permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law, as stated in resolution 59/31. Indeed, solidarity with the Palestinian people is an intrinsic part of our common responsibility to support the Middle East peace process.

It is in that context that the General Assembly, in the same resolution of last year, recalled the relevant Security Council resolutions and welcomed the affirmation by the Security Council of the vision of a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders. That constitutes the foundation for the peace process.

Let me also use this occasion to express appreciation to all Governments, regional organizations, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and individuals for their untiring work and dedication to achieving lasting peace and security in the Middle East and to providing humanitarian and economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

We must spare no effort to assist both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to decades of Palestinian-Israeli confrontation and conflict.

I was particularly gratified to hear this morning the message of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in which he stated that the Palestinian Authority has "chosen peace and negotiations as the path to reaching a just and comprehensive peace". And, he added, "our hands remain outstretched for peace".

This year has already marked some real progress. The Palestinian people demonstrated their commitment to democracy during the presidential election in January. The international community welcomed the Israeli withdrawal and dismantlement of settlements in the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank in the late summer. Last week, on 25 November, following an agreement by both sides on movement

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and access, the President of the Palestinian Authority formally reopened the Gaza Strip's border crossing with Egypt, thus giving the Palestinians control over one of their frontiers for the first time in their history. An important step was thus taken to fulfil the vision of a future Palestinian State.

All those who made that possible through painstaking and complicated negotiations, with persistence and tenacity of effort, are to be commended. The parties are encouraged to continue their cooperation on outstanding issues related to disengagement, supported by the international community.

The road map, supported by the Quartet, provides a solid basis for the continued work for peace. The international community must intensify its engagement in helping the parties to end a conflict which for far too long has tormented the region and its peoples. It is crucial that Palestinians and Israelis now cooperate to the fullest extent possible. Actions which could aggravate the situation and increase suspicions and mistrust must not be undertaken. Violence and acts of terror must cease.

In the meantime, everything must be done to alleviate the daily plight of the Palestinian people. Access and mobility are crucial for dealing with unemployment and poverty. International assistance should focus not only on humanitarian relief, but also on capacity-building programmes as part of a development strategy for a future Palestinian State.

Let us hope and let us be determined that, with the full backing of the United Nations and the world community, the peace process will be reactivated so that we can finally see the realization of the vision of a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, face the future together in peace and cooperation.

I give the floor to Mr. Paul Badji of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/60/L.28 to A/60/L.31 in the course of his statement.

Mr. Badji (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): In order to express their unswerving support for the Palestinian people in its quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, many representatives of Member States, observer States, intergovernmental organizations, agencies of the United Nations system and civil society organizations responded this morning to the invitation of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and participated in the solemn meeting that was held, as it is every year on 29 November, to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. As Chairman of the Committee, I thank them all for their keen interest, staunch support and active participation in the quest for a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Before I introduce the four draft resolutions that have been submitted by the Committee under agenda item 37 of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, I should like to make a few brief comments about the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and developments in the political process.

The past year has been marked by promise and hope, as well as by one development in the situation on the ground that has further complicated efforts to revive the political process for the implementation of the road map. The death more than a year ago of the national leader Yasser Arafat has posed a real challenge for the Palestinian people and its institutions. The transition was democratic and peaceful, and following free and fair elections, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas was elected President of the Palestinian Authority. With the assistance of the international community, and particularly that of Egypt, the first summit meeting to be held in a long time was convened in February 2004 in Sharm el-Sheikh between the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Ariel Sharon, and the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Abbas. The commitments undertaken by the two parties — especially with regard to the cessation of all acts of violence, the return to Palestinian Authority control of five Palestinian towns of the West Bank, and the release of a number of Palestinian prisoners — have created a new momentum conducive to the resumption of the political process.

In September, the Committee welcomed Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from four settlements in the northern West Bank. The Committee deemed the withdrawal to be one of the most significant political developments of recent years in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and recognized the resolute efforts of the Palestinian Authority to coordinate the withdrawal with the Israeli side in order to ensure the smooth management of the new situation created thereby. That positive development was helpful in the resumption of security coordination between the

parties and gave rise to hope that could be exploited and built on to secure better cooperation between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

A very broad sector of international opinion held that the withdrawal from Gaza was a promising stage that could help to relaunch negotiations within the framework of the road map and advance the political process that had long been deadlocked. Committee members believe that the withdrawal from Gaza should be complete and irreversible, and enable the Palestinian Authority to exercise control over Gaza's borders, air and maritime spaces, and the transit points between that part of the territory and the rest of Palestine. They also deem it essential to obtain Israeli guarantees concerning the unimpeded circulation of persons and goods in and out of Gaza.

The building and use of a maritime port and an airport, as well as the establishment of a permanent geographic link to the West Bank, are absolutely crucial to Gaza's economy. It is precisely for those reasons that we welcomed the agreements concluded on 15 November between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on movement and access from and to Gaza. It is now crucial that those agreements be scrupulously and promptly implemented in order to give Palestinians and Israelis alike a sense of hope and progress following the positive developments of recent months.

Furthermore, the Committee remains profoundly concerned about the intensified expansion of settlement activity in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and the accelerated construction of the illegal wall in the occupied Palestinian territory. Settlement activities have been accompanied by disturbing information concerning plans to establish permanent links between several West Bank settlements, particularly in East Jerusalem and its environs. All of that runs counter to Israel's obligations under the road map, which calls for a freeze in the building of settlements. Israel's policy and the facts that it has created on the ground are also violations of international law and of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Moreover, Israel's ongoing incursions into urban and rural Palestinian centres throughout the year, extrajudicial executions, demolition of homes, arrests and other actions, as well as the violent reprisals they have provoked — including four suicide bombings — jeopardize the hope for a speedy return to political dialogue. Those actions have also had a harmful effect on the positive momentum created by Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements concluded between the Palestinian and Israeli sides early in the year.

At this critical juncture, on behalf of the Committee, I call on the Government of Israel to refrain from taking any action that might further destabilize the situation. Israel must, in particular, renounce its policy of developing settlements and halt the construction of the wall on the West Bank. It is to be hoped that Israel will facilitate the preparations for and holding of the forthcoming elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council scheduled for January 2006, in which the Palestinians of East Jerusalem must be able to participate fully. Furthermore, Israel must take steps to improve significantly the humanitarian situation of Palestinians by lifting curfews and reducing restrictions on the movement of people and goods.

The international community's readiness to help the parties in that complex process, leading to a resumption of direct negotiations, has been encouraging. The Committee welcomes the efforts of the Quartet and by each of its members to help the parties to move towards the implementation of the road map. The appointment of Mr. James Wolfensohn as the Quartet's Special Envoy was crucial to facilitating economic and logistic measures that are essential to improving the daily lives of the Palestinian population of Gaza. We recognize in particular the personal contribution of Mr. Wolfensohn to that task. International donors have pledged substantial financial contributions to improve the economic and social situation in Gaza following the Israeli withdrawal. The European Union is prepared to provide a third-party presence at the Rafah crossing.

Our Committee firmly believes that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility over the question of Palestine until it is effectively resolved in all of its aspects. Ultimately, only the implementation of United Nations resolutions — in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) — will guarantee a permanent solution consisting in the creation of two States and based on the 1967 borders and the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to independence and national sovereignty.

This month, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of its establishment by the General Assembly. Members of the Committee are aware that some Member States are questioning its raison d'être and that some are critical of its activities, which they deem to be imbalanced and partial. In that regard, allow me respectfully to remind those that offer such critiques that the Committee is the only intergovernmental body of the United Nations dealing solely with the political aspects of the question of Palestine. It was created by the General Assembly specifically to promote the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights in order to arrive at a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Unfortunately, progress in that respect has been very slow, at best, notwithstanding certain positive developments. The situation on the ground remains most unstable and the occupation of Palestinian land continues, with all its repercussions. Thanks to its interaction with the main organs of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council and the General Assembly, thanks to its contacts with Member States and intergovernmental organizations, and thanks to the Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights and the assistance it provides through its programme of international meetings and conferences, its publications, its updating of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine — a unique and rich electronic resource containing thousands of United Nations documents on this issue — and its cooperation with civil society, the Committee believes that it is raising international public awareness of all aspects of the question of Palestine and promoting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Furthermore, as a concrete and practical means of support, since 1996 the Committee's programme of work has included an annual training programme for officials and professionals of the Palestinian Authority. Twenty young Palestinians, specializing in various fields, have acquired in-depth knowledge of the United Nations system and work undertaken on the question of Palestine. That very useful programme, organized by the Division for Palestinian Rights, has been frequently commended by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority.

Since its establishment, the Committee has advocated for a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, pursuant to the principles of international law. It welcomed the peace process launched in the Middle East in 1991 at the Madrid peace conference, and subsequently actively encouraged the parties' implementation of the Oslo Accords. It gave its full support to the road map initiated by the Quartet in order to realize the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders. At the same time, and pursuant to its mandate, the Committee continues to promote the full exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to mobilize international assistance on behalf of the Palestinian people and solidarity with it.

In that context, I should like to introduce to the General Assembly the four draft resolutions adopted by the Committee, the texts of which have been circulated under agenda item 37 in documents A/60/L.28, A/60/L.29, A/60/L.30 and A/60/L.31. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has joined the list of sponsors of draft resolution A/60/L.28 and Namibia is now a sponsor of all four draft resolutions.

The first three draft resolutions relate respectively to the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information. They reaffirm the important mandates entrusted by the General Assembly to that subsidiary body and those Secretariat structures. As it has in the past, the Committee intends to ensure that the resources made available to it are used effectively for all of its mandated tasks. The three draft resolutions have been duly updated.

The fourth draft resolution, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question", reiterates the General Assembly's position vis-à-vis the essential elements of such a settlement and refers to developments in the situation over the course of the past year. In particular, this year's draft stresses the need for the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings concluded between Israel and Palestine in February 2005 and to put an end to Israeli settlement activities in the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank.

The four draft resolutions that I have just introduced outline positions, mandates and programmes that are of special importance, particularly

at this critical stage. I appeal to members of the General Assembly to vote in favour of the draft resolutions and to support the important objectives contained therein.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Colin Scicluna, who will introduce the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on behalf of the Committee's Rapporteur.

Mr. Scicluna (Malta): It is an honour for me to present to the General Assembly, on behalf of the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Ambassador Victor Camilleri, the annual report of the Committee, contained in document A/60/35.

In the course of the past year, the Committee has continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report I am about to present covers developments relating to the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee since last year's report, through 5 October of this year.

The introduction of the report outlines the Committee's objectives and its general perspective of events that have taken place in the course of the year.

Chapters II and III summarize the General Assembly mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and give an account of the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine and the relevant political developments, as monitored by the Committee during the year. Reviewed here are various aspects of the situation on the ground, including the passing of the Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, in November 2004; the election of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas as Palestinian Authority President; Israeli actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, such as the recent disengagement from the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the northern West Bank; the expanding settlement activities; the implications of the ongoing construction of the wall in the West Bank and around East Jerusalem; the situation with respect to Palestinian prisoners; the humanitarian situation and the state of the Palestinian economy; the situation with respect to water resources available to the Palestinians; action by the United Nations system; and the continuing operational difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In this Chapter, the Committee also states its position with regard to extrajudicial executions of Palestinians and terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians.

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action aimed at promoting Palestinian rights in the United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council. This section makes reference to the communications addressed by the Chairman of the Committee to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, and includes information on the participation by the Chairman at events organized by civil society in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Section B contains a detailed account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division. It provides information on the continued dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Sub-section 1 gives an account of the various international meetings and conferences organized in the course of the year.

This section also deals with the Committee's cooperation with intergovernmental organizations and civil society; research, monitoring and publications work of the Division; the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done over the year by the Department of Public Information in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 59/30 of 1 December 2004.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In this Chapter, the Committee welcomes the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and four small settlements in the northern West Bank as a rare window of opportunity that should be used to revive negotiations within the framework of the road map and move the stalled political process forward. It expresses particular concern about the intention of the Israeli

Government to expand large settlement blocks in the West Bank, isolating East Jerusalem from the West Bank and separating the southern West Bank from its northern part. The Committee reiterates its position of principle that the settlements and the wall constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are contrary to international humanitarian law and numerous resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly adopted since 1967, as well as provisions of the road map.

The Committee states that it has been encouraged by renewed efforts of the international community to revitalize the road map, to facilitate the dialogue between the parties and to implement their commitments under the road map. The Committee affirms its intention to continue to promote support for the road map and the important work of the Quartet as the best way to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and other relevant resolutions, and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

The Committee expresses its appreciation to Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations entities and civil society for their involvement in its programmes of international meetings and conferences. It expresses its intention to address such issues as the need to end the occupation of all Palestinian land; support of the Palestinian Authority's efforts to rehabilitate the economy, especially that of the Gaza Strip; the responsibility of all Governments to apply international law to all aspects of the question of Palestine; the adverse consequences of the settlement policy and the construction of the wall for the achievement of a two-State solution.

The Committee further commends civil society organizations for their efforts to uphold international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and by mobilizing public opinion, as well as for their unremitting initiatives to provide relief and assistance to the Palestinian people.

The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other informational activities, including the further development of the UNISPAL documents collection. The Committee also notes the usefulness of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority, in spite of the difficulties on the ground, and requests the Division to continue it.

The Committee expresses the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion on the relevant issues. The Committee requests the programme's continuation, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and in view of the many difficulties facing the Palestinian people and besetting the peace process, the Committee calls on all States to join in that endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in its deliberations on this very important issue.

The President: I now give the floor to the Chairman of the observer delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to thank you, Sir, for your statements earlier at this meeting and at this morning's official meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

A few weeks ago, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of its establishment by the General Assembly. That occasion embodied a great many of the issues related to the question of Palestine. It highlighted the permanent responsibility of the United Nations on the question of Palestine until its resolution in all its aspects, and the commitment of the members of the Committee to fulfil the mandate entrusted to them.

It also highlighted, however, the tragic reality that the Palestinian people, despite the passage of so many years and the positions of the United Nations and its various organs, is still being denied its inalienable rights, particularly its right to self-determination and national independence, all as a result of Israel's

rejection of the will of the international community and of international law, and its ongoing colonization of Palestinian land.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a similar case in which an entire people has been living either in exile for 57 years or under occupation for 38 years and subject to a de facto colonial settlement campaign, while the occupying Power continues to refuse to implement any of the numerous resolutions of the United Nations and continues to violate international law, including international humanitarian and human rights laws.

We wish to express our deep appreciation to the Chairman of the Committee and its members, and call on the States Members of the United Nations to maintain their support in the face of Israel's intransigence and rejection in order to resolve the question of Palestine and achieve genuine peace based on the two-State solution and the 1949 Armistice Line or what are commonly referred to as the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

If that is to occur, the central task of the international community must be to achieve a real cessation of the colonizing of Palestinian territory, which is being pursued through the construction and expansion of settlements and the building of a wall on Palestinian land, including in and around East Jerusalem. Israel continues to construct settlements in defiance of the provisions of international law; of relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council; and of the peace process and the provisions of the road map. Israel continues to build its wall despite the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice and the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session. Israel also continues to take illegal measures in and around East Jerusalem aimed at the Judaization and de facto annexation of the city, despite all of the foregoing.

Israel has thus been striving relentlessly to create conditions on the ground that, if allowed to persist, threaten to close the window of opportunity to achieve the two-State solution. Israel alone will be responsible for the collapse of the solution, but all of us — beginning, of course, with the Palestinian people — will pay the price. It is incumbent upon the international community to prevent that from happening and to safeguard the two-State solution. The first step must be to halt the settlement activities, the construction of the wall, and the Israeli measures in East Jerusalem.

In September, Israel carried out its disengagement plan in the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank. We consider that action to be an important development, and believe that the cessation of the colonization of parts of our Palestinian land, through the dismantling of the settlements and the withdrawal of the settlers and the Israeli occupying forces from the Gaza Strip, is a positive development potentially leading to others. However, the disengagement plan remains unilateral and Israel, in implementing it, wrought widespread destruction in the settlement areas and left many important issues unresolved, including those of the checkpoints, the airport, the seaport and the link between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Despite all that, agreement was recently reached on some of these important issues, first and foremost that of the Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt — an agreement which we hope will be implemented in full and appropriately and will lead to agreement on all the other pending issues. That is crucial to improving the living conditions of the population of the Gaza Strip, a small and impoverished region that is the most densely populated in the world.

We are also in urgent need of more assistance and its expeditious delivery in order to bear our additional burdens, not only in the Gaza Strip, but also in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We wish to commend the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Quartet, Mr. James Wolfensohn, to secure that assistance and to help the two parties to reach appropriate solutions.

Of great importance now, in addition to all of the foregoing, is guaranteeing that developments will not stop with the Gaza Strip. There must be a real opportunity to return to the road map, beginning with the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings, including an Israeli withdrawal from cities and areas to pre-September 2000 positions and the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. I reiterate that, whether or not we succeed in returning to the road map, we must definitely ensure the genuine cessation of settlement activities, the construction of the wall and other Israeli measures in Jerusalem. That

is all mandatory under international law and essential to the preservation of any hope for peace.

To that end, we need the Quartet to adopt specific and practical positions and an agreement on measures to be taken by Member States. We need action from everyone, including the Secretariat, which should, inter alia, implement the General Assembly resolution on the preparation of a register of damages caused by the construction of the wall.

The Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian leadership find themselves shouldering the responsibility of fulfilling post-conflict tasks while remaining, in their entirety, under foreign occupation and subject to the ongoing colonization of their land. Such a situation has never arisen before and there is no precedent to draw upon. Nevertheless, we are making extraordinary efforts to succeed and have achieved reasonable results thanks to the resolve and imagination of our people, international political support and foreign assistance.

We are making efforts to build State institutions in order to achieve the rule of law and to strengthen the social fabric of our people. We are also in the process of filling the large vacuum left behind by the passing of our leader, President Yasser Arafat, and have managed to achieve a smooth transition of power and to hold new presidential elections that resulted in the election of President Mahmoud Abbas and his assumption of his duties.

In that context, we are also in the process of holding our second legislative elections. We wish to emphasize our opposition to any interference by Israel or any other party in those elections, which should be truly democratic and open to all Palestinians and all political groups and should be held throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The participation of all parties and groups will enhance the democratic process and the rule of law, and should be combined with and followed by measures and laws to consolidate the political system, including in areas related to weapons and other security issues.

Israel should not create obstacles to any of those important political processes, in particular with regard to freedom of movement and the participation of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Through a responsible national dialogue, we have been able to reach agreement on a unilateral approach to promoting calm and we understand the need to continue that process. In that regard, we believe the elections will have a positive impact.

As part of the international community, we reiterate our condemnation of terrorism in all its forms, including the latest terrorist attacks in the Jordanian capital, Amman. It so happens that one of the victims of the attacks was a colleague of ours from the Foreign Ministry. We must enhance our collective efforts to confront that phenomenon and must fortify our will through a clear and strong legal framework supported by all. We must all agree that any targeting of innocent civilians, anywhere at any time, regardless of the reasons, constitutes a condemnable terrorist act that we must combat.

We must also all agree that cases of armed conflict, including foreign occupation, are governed by international humanitarian law and are in accordance with those rules and provisions. We are convinced of those positions and will work tirelessly to achieve full compliance with all of those rules and provisions, including in our region. We also hope to contribute to the achievement of a consensus among all parties concerned to conclude a comprehensive convention to combat international terrorism.

We must save our region from future confrontations and conflicts. We are working hard to ensure that the Palestinian element in the region is positive. In that context, we wish Lebanon every success and prosperity and reaffirm that Palestinians in Lebanon are not party to any internal issues and that they are not above the law.

We also hope that Syria will be able to solve the problems related to Security Council resolution 1636 (2005) in a way that helps the investigation and preserves the dignity and sovereignty of Syria on the basis of respect for that resolution.

Naturally, we look forward to the return to normalcy in Iraq and to ending the violence and terrorism, while at the same time preserving Iraqi unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

There have been many extraordinary developments in the region, including in our country and in Israel. We hope those developments will enhance the potential for a speedy return to negotiations and to the actual implementation of the road map towards the achievement of peace in and

between two States, Israel and Palestine, as well as in the region and in the world in its entirety.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, I am honoured to express to Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to members of the Committee and to the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights our appreciation for their commendable efforts to achieve justice for the Palestinian people.

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the United Arab Emirates wishes to reaffirm its solidarity and support to the Palestinian people in their just struggle to achieve their legitimate aspiration to establish an independent State, like other peoples of the world.

In spite of some positive developments since last September, including Israel's military withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the agreement on the Rafah border crossing, the expected outcome of those developments has not yet been fully realized due to the obstacles created by the Israeli forces, which have prevented the achievement of full independence of the Gaza Strip and its crossings. Those obstacles include intensive and illegal settlement activities by Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and continued daily violations against the Palestinian people. They have led to substantial losses in various sectors of the Palestinian economy, including the health, education, tourism and services sectors. This has made many Palestinian institutions economically sluggish and has led to acute increases in unemployment, poverty and disease among the Palestinian people. These Israeli policies in the Palestinian territories have impeded efforts and opportunities for achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peaceful solution to the Palestinian question.

The annual reports of various United Nations committees and agencies, supported by documents and statistics, continue to reflect Israel's true intentions and ambitions in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan. The reports confirm the increasing numbers of Palestinians who are killed or injured as a result of continued Israeli air strikes, the excessive use of force, targeted killings and the detention and displacement of thousands of civilians in the Palestinian territories administrated by the Israeli authorities, under the pretexts of combating terrorism and of self-defence.

During the past four years that Government has methodically torn away Palestinian agricultural lands and economic resources and destroyed more than 4,000 Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and its environs. It has built new settlements, residential units and new bypass roads, confiscated thousands of acres of Palestinian land and imposed military authority and administration for the purpose of constructing the so-called separation wall. The wall has isolated thousands of Palestinian people in separate cantons, and dozens of villages have been annexed, separating the northern and southern parts of the West Bank. Palestinians have been deprived of the right of access to their homes, relatives in East Jerusalem and to sacred sites.

All of those Israeli actions violate United Nations resolutions, including those adopted at the Assembly's tenth emergency special session, and disregard the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which considers the construction of the wall to be illegal and invalid and calls for its immediate dismantling. The separation wall also obstructs the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State and the principles of the road map, which calls for the realization of a vision of two States living side by side in peaceful coexistence.

The United Arab Emirates reiterates its strong condemnation of those Israeli practices, including the illegitimate and illegal measures taken in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which constitute a unilateral attempt to change the demographic, political and legal nature of the Palestinian territories and impose a fait accompli. We consider such attempts to be null and void. Such measures must be brought to an end before final status negotiations can bègin, as they constitute a blatant violation to the road map, international and humanitarian law, the United Nations Charter and resolutions and international conventions, including the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

The United Arab Emirates is extremely concerned about the serious consequences of those dangerous Israeli policies being ignored by the international community, policies that have fuelled frustration and despair among the peoples of the region and increased violence, tension and instability. We therefore emphasize once again the main common responsibility of the international community,

represented by the United Nations and its specialized agencies, in this regard. We call on the Security Council, and the Quartet in particular, to put the necessary pressure on Israel to end its hostile campaigns against the Palestinians and their National Authority, including collective punishment, State terrorism and incitement, with a view to creating an environment suitable for reinvigorating the peace process and resuming negotiations.

In this context, we call, first, for Israel to be forced to cooperate with the Palestinian Authority regarding its full withdrawal from all territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, to stop all illegal settlement activities in those territories, and to dismantle those settlements as well as the separation wall, in accordance with the relevant opinion of the International Court of Justice and relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Secondly, Israel must provide protection for the Palestinian people, their national institutions and their sacred sites, the religious identity of which Israel is attempting to change especially the Al Aqsa Mosque. We also call on the international community to compel Israel to fulfil its commitments in accordance with international law and to prevent it from changing the historical landmarks of Jerusalem.

Thirdly, we call on the international community to provide political, financial and moral support to the Palestinian Authority, which has demonstrated its determination to fulfil its commitments in accordance with the road map and to carry out the necessary reforms in its national institutions, above all its security institutions. Such reforms will enable the Palestinian security institutions to fully discharge their national responsibilities, which include the management of the next legislative elections, the reconstruction of destroyed development sectors, the improvement of the painful humanitarian and social conditions in the Palestinian territories and the strengthening of its control over all Palestinian territories. Here, we cannot fail to welcome the commendable efforts of the Governments of Jordan and Egypt, the representative of the Quartet, James Wolfensohn, and the European Union in this respect.

Fourthly, we reaffirm the fundamental principles of the Palestinian question with regard to settlements, borders, refugees and the status of Jerusalem, as stipulated in internationally binding resolutions, notably General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), which are all consistent with the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut Summit.

We believe that an appropriate Israeli response to the just demands of the Arab people would lead to security and stability for the Israeli people and for the entire region. In this regard, we look forward to strengthening our peace effort, in order to reinvigorate the road map, as well as peace negotiations in the region, in fulfilment of the commitments included in resolutions of international legitimacy and in accordance with the principle of land for peace based on 1967 borders, in order to bring stability, prosperity, cooperation and development to the people of the entire region.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (spoke in French): I would like to express deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for having convened this special meeting, which has been held for half a century to focus the attention of the General Assembly on the question of Palestine and the struggle of Palestinian people. There can be no doubt that this central issue, which has attracted the attention of the entire international community, remains the most important issue affecting peace and stability in the Middle East, the cradle of civilizations.

The situation in the Middle East is at a very delicate stage. The entire international community, in particular the influential parties, are called upon to make efforts to end the cycle of violence and conflict in the region, to bring about a return to dialogue and negotiation and to embark on serious and responsible work with a view to putting an end to the conflict and to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution that guarantees the liberation of all occupied Arab territories and allows for peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the region.

Tunisia, like other peace-loving countries, has from this position often warned the Assembly about dangers that will result from a failure of the peace process and the non-implementation of agreements with the Palestinian party, as well as the cessation of negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, because they all represent a setback to the peace efforts.

There can be no doubt that the intransigence of the Israeli Government with regard to its attitude towards Palestinian civilians, its expansionist policies and its insistence on the construction of the separation wall is counterproductive, as the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice makes clear, and is not in the interests of the region. The provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War have become ineffective because of such Israeli policies and practices. Violence only generates more violence. There is no way to break the cycle unless there is genuine and responsible engagement in the peace process and in the principles of the road map so that the vision of two States living side by side in peace, security and good-neighbourliness can be realized.

The establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region requires a full and unconditional withdrawal by Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan and from the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, in accordance with all the relevant resolutions and terms of reference.

The Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the opening of the Rafah Crossing are both positive developments within the framework of the implementation of the road map. We hope they will be followed by similar and expeditious measures in the West Bank and in other occupied Palestinian territories. We must not allow internal considerations in the region to further delay the search for peace.

The road towards peace remains long and difficult. It will require all our efforts to protect the peace endeavour and to refrain from making confrontational statements, which only undermine trust and confidence between the parties to the conflict. It is essential for the international community to learn from past experiences so as to avoid all elements and shortfalls that impeded the peace process. We look forward with hope to the Quartet's efforts to reactivate the road map, to restore trust between the Palestinians and Israelis and to open the way for the resumption of peace negotiations in order to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy its legitimate rights, particularly the right to establish its own independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Tunisia's strong belief in the just cause of the Palestinian people and its constant commitment to support them in their hour of need will only enhance efforts to reach a peaceful, just and comprehensive settlement in accordance with the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted at the Beirut Summit in March 2002. Tunisia will continue its bilateral, regional and international efforts under the leadership of its President, His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question that will enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their legitimate rights and will establish security, stability and peaceful coexistence in the region so that its peoples can focus on development and reconstruction.

Here we cannot fail to express our heartfelt appreciation for all efforts made by the United Nations, as the guarantor and protector of the principles of international legitimacy, to address the crisis in the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict. In particular, we should like to commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, under the skilful leadership of Ambassador Badji, and other United Nations committees and bodies that are working to establish peace in the region. They must continue their efforts until they complete their mandates under the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

Mrs. Ismail (Malaysia): At the outset, my delegation would like to associate itself with the statement made earlier by Mr. Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We thank the Committee for its report (A/60/35). We also thank the Secretary-General for his report submitted under agenda item 15 (A/60/5[illegible]). We continue to greatly appreciate the indispensable work carried out by the Committee, by the Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights and by other organs within the United Nations system concerning the question before us. We highly commend the commitment, efforts and contribution of the Secretary-General and his Office in that regard. We hope that they will persevere in carrying out their mandates and tasks until peace is achieved in the region and a State of Palestine is created, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Today, we are observing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Prime Minister of Malaysia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), has transmitted a message for that occasion, which outlines the concerns

and aspirations of NAM on the question of Palestine. The statement should be read in conjunction with that message.

The reports of the Committee and of the Secretary-General continue to contain very disturbing accounts and revelations and to reflect stark realities concerning the situation on the ground. There have certainly been too many deaths, too many injuries, too much destruction and indescribable suffering — especially among the Palestinians — as a result of repressive policies, practices and measures carried out by Israel. All this is contrary to Israel's obligation under international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The international community must prevail upon Israel to respect its legal obligations, just as other States are expected to do. We have a duty at the United Nations to stop all the continuing atrocities and abhorrent policies and practices committed by Israel against the Palestinian population.

We should not consider the casualties and destruction on both sides in terms of numbers or percentages alone. The life of each human being — man, woman or child — is sacred and precious, and it must be protected. Any act of violence inflicted upon innocent civilians in this conflict, be they Palestinians or Israelis, is unacceptable and deserves equal condemnation by all of us.

The period under review has seen several measures and efforts by both the Palestinians and the Israelis towards peace within the framework of the road map. However, the path towards peace remains a difficult and complicated process. The difficulties could be overcome by stronger political will among all parties concerned. In that connection, my delegation considers the resumption of dialogue at the highest level between Palestinian and Israeli leaders, as well as renewed efforts by members of the Quartet, to be a very encouraging development. We also commend Egypt and Jordan for their role in facilitating the peace process. We are confident that all parties concerned will persevere in their important efforts.

In addition, we consider Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from parts of the northern West Bank last September to be a positive move. However, we strongly oppose the expansion and planned further expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. They are contrary to Israel's obligations under the road map.

We welcome the historic reopening three days ago of the Rafah Crossing, a crucial link between the Gaza Strip and the outside world. That positive development not only has provided the 1.3 million mostly impoverished Palestinians in that area with access to various types of humanitarian assistance in neighbouring Egypt and offered them greater opportunities for economic activity and employment, but, most important, it has marked the regaining by the Palestinian people of an important part of their freedom and control of their own borders in that area after 38 years of Israeli occupation.

Israel's ongoing construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, seriously endangers the prospects for comprehensive peace in the region. The impact of the wall on all aspects of Palestinian life in the areas concerned, as documented in several United Nations reports, is overwhelming. The wall threatens the territorial integrity of a future State of Palestine, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) and upheld in the road map.

The wall is one of the most visible signs of the transformation of the territory into a vast open-air prison — something that is unprecedented in modern history. The wall is a visible and clear act of territorial annexation by Israel under the guise of self-defence and security. As we are all aware, the wall was declared contrary to international law by the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, in its advisory opinion rendered on 9 July 2004. The General Assembly consequently adopted, by an overwhelming majority, resolution ES-10/15 outlining several important follow-up and concrete measures and, inter alia, demanding that Israel stop the construction of the wall, dismantle and remove the completed sections of the wall, and pay reparations to all those affected by the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory. We renew our call on Israel to take all necessary measures to comply with the International Court of Justice advisory opinion and resolution ES-10/15. We find it highly regrettable that the Security Council has not been able to look into the specific question of the separation wall in accordance with its functions and powers under Article 24 of the United Nations Charter.

The question of Palestine remains high on the agenda of both the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Malaysia, as Chair of NAM and the tenth OIC summit, has initiated several high-level initiatives relating to the question of Palestine this year. Some of those initiatives are as follows.

First, Malaysian civil society organizations, under the sponsorship of Peace Malaysia, successfully convened a World Civil Society Conference on Peace in Palestine in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 28 to 30 March 2005. The Conference, which was held pursuant to a decision by NAM and attended by representatives of civil society organizations from many parts of the world, including Israel, agreed, inter alia, to establish an international centre on Palestine for civil society in the south, to be located in Malaysia. The international centre would serve as a focal point for the global civil society campaign in support of Palestine. It is the Movement's hope that the international campaign will be able to mobilize international public opinion against the continued Israeli occupation and illegal construction of the wall and settlements, and in support of the early realization of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

Secondly, the foreign ministers of NAM, who met in Doha in June and in New York in September, and the Foreign Ministers of OIC, who met in Sana'a in June and in New York in September, expressed, inter alia, their solidarity and support for the Palestinian people, as well as the need for the members of the Quartet to fulfil their responsibility to fully implement the road map towards the viable creation of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

Thirdly, the foreign ministers of the NAM Committee on Palestine, who met in New York on 19 September, agreed on a number of measures to be taken by NAM in the context of the Movement's strong support for the Palestinian cause, aimed at moving the peace process forward.

Finally, the NAM and OIC ministerial delegations on Palestine met with their counterparts from the Quartet and permanent members of the Security Council at the margins of the High-level Plenary Meeting and the general debate of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session. During those meetings, they conveyed the position of NAM and OIC on the urgency of pushing the peace process forward, beginning with salvaging the road map, as well as the concerns of both organizations on the continuing construction of the separation wall and the Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory.

It is incumbent upon Israel to demonstrate to the international community that it is genuinely committed to a peaceful solution rather than to a military one. Israel must realize that there can never be a military solution to the conflict. Similarly, the Palestinian Authority, with assistance from the international community, should continue with efforts to reform its relevant institutions and improve its security apparatus. My delegation commends the Palestinian Authority for what it has achieved in that regard, despite various constraints. We urge both sides to continue to create, on the basis of and in compliance with the road map, the necessary environment that would enable negotiations to take place. The objective of a permanent two-State solution of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, is achievable. The international community has a collective role to play in that regard. We must all work together to facilitate and redouble our efforts to attain a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council, has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects on the basis of the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. The question should also be resolved in accordance with international law. In that connection, my delegation reaffirms its support for the important efforts of the Quartet and other concerned parties in pursuing the difficult and complicated path towards peace. The General Assembly is the last bastion of hope for the Palestinian people. The Assembly must uphold the rule of law and the purposes and principles of the Charter. In that connection, Malaysia is pleased to join other delegations in sponsoring the four draft resolutions initiated by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which have been presented by the Chairman of the Committee for consideration by the Assembly under this important agenda item.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly is meeting once again to discuss the question of Palestine, an international issue that the

international community has failed to settle over more than half a century.

Our discussion today is of special importance, coinciding as it does with our observation of the Organization's sixtieth anniversary and with efforts to implement the outcome document of the High-level Plenary Meeting in order to establish a more effective United Nations capable of upholding the principles on which it was founded and that are the indispensable basis of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world, in particular the principles of justice and equality and the rights of peoples suffering under colonial control and foreign occupation to exercise self-determination.

In that respect, the spirit of the United Nations sixtieth anniversary should embody the spirit of the resolutions adopted every year by the General Assembly on the question of Palestine, which call on Israel to withdraw from all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied in 1967 and to restore the full rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among which are the right of return of Palestinian refugees; the right to self-determination, the right to establish their independent State on their own land, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and the right to live free of all violations of their human rights, including their right to life.

The spirit of our tireless work should also extend to including Palestine in the implementation of the final document of the world summit, which marked the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations. The principles and values that we have all reaffirmed should be applied to that question. We should strive to enhance the values of justice and equality, and we should strengthen the understanding of Israel's responsibility as an occupying Power, until the Palestinian State is established as soon as possible. We should also intensify our efforts for the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

Similarly, our quest to increase respect for human rights and to decrease selectivity, politicization and the use of double standards requires us to put an end to all violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people. We should address the human rights of Palestinians and Israelis on an equal and just basis. We should put an end to the inhumane practices against the Palestinians resulting from the policies of siege, closure, continued settler expansion, confiscation of land, destruction of agriculture and the construction of the separation wall within the Palestinian territories. This separation wall is in clear violation of the legal and moral values of the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion in the case concerning the *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*.

Furthermore, our work to enhance the system of collective security requires us to enhance the security of the Palestinian people within the borders of their occupied territories. We should put an end to the policy of assassinating activists and provide the Palestinian Authority with the full opportunity to perform its role — to control the security situation on Palestinian lands without interference, and to strengthen its authority to implement the security needs of those lands as the Palestinian people desire.

Proceeding from the same basis, the United Nations should maximize its use of the Peacebuilding Commission when it is established, to enable it to take the Palestinian people, economically and socially, to a new level. They could then realize their wishes and aspirations for a better life and advance from the status of occupation to one of freedom and stability within the framework of effective international support, a status based on the democratic practices that will be confirmed by the elections to be conducted, freely and without interference, in 2006.

Similarly, our work in the field of institutional reform should be based on the promotion and reactivation of the work of all committees, bodies and secretariats in charge of guaranteeing the full exercise by the Palestinian people of their rights. Such work should not be replaced by attempts for whatever reason to limit the activities of the United Nations in that important field.

Therefore, we call upon all Member States to endorse all draft resolutions submitted under the present agenda item. Based upon our strong belief in the crucial role of the United Nations, Egypt, together with other internationally influential parties, strongly supports the special role played by the Quartet to guarantee the success of efforts aimed at the application of the road map towards final status negotiations.

We call upon the United Nations to make every effort in that regard until those objectives are realized. We would also like to reiterate that we will make every

possible effort whenever such effort is required, until an independent Palestinian State is established.

In that context, we welcome the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from some Palestinian cities in the West Bank, as well as the opening of the Rafah crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. We call upon the Israeli Government to proceed further by withdrawing from all occupied Palestinian territories and to implement its obligations under the road map so that we can achieve our common objective — the establishment of two independent States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security.

That achievement should be based on a number of principles and values, the most important of which is that the Israeli withdrawal should be part of the implementation of the road map and should be followed by other steps, such as withdrawal from the remaining Palestinian territories in the West Bank and from Jerusalem, and an agreement on a final settlement. That withdrawal should also include all crossings, seaports and airports and should guarantee the freedoms of the Palestinian people. The Israeli policies of incursion, invasion and assassination, besieging the Gaza Strip and targeting its population on any pretext should end.

International consensus on the promotion of the multilateral order should contribute to the realization of the vision of the two States in an equitable and just manner, in strict implementation of the stipulations of the road map, without bias or selectivity, and through the creation of a genuine partnership among the major parties on the international scene — foremost among which is the Quartet — in order to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine.

Only then can we recognize that the United Nations has achieved its objectives in terms of respect for its values and principles and in guaranteeing security and respect for human rights. That is when all of the international efforts to assist the Palestinian people in building a better future will also be realized. We hope that that will occur as soon as possible.

Mr. Sen (India): India has warmly welcomed the agreement concluded between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the Rafah border crossing for travel between Gaza and Egypt and for building a seaport in the Gaza Strip. We believe that that was a significant development that will go a long way towards improving the lives and economy of the Palestinian people living in the Gaza Strip. There also seems to be a need for a floating dock or some other such arrangement, which can be operationalized quickly, because the belief that there is no guaranteed border outlet seems to be holding back foreign investors.

The opening of the Rafah border crossing last Saturday, which enabled 1,548 Palestinians to cross into Egypt without being subject to Israeli checks for the first time, has raised hopes for further progress in efforts to revitalize the Middle East peace process. There have also been other signs generating optimism this year. The election of President Mahmoud Abbas in January 2005 demonstrated the commitment of the Palestinian people to democracy.

In September, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank, marking Israel's first withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territory since 1967. That landmark event set an important precedent for the eventual realization of a two-State solution. India welcomed the withdrawal as a positive development and the beginning of a process that, we hoped, would take forward the negotiations in accordance with the road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions. The elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, scheduled for January 2006, will provide further incentive for the Palestinians to fully engage in the democratic process.

With a renewed sense of optimism also comes the hard reckoning of reality. The report of the Secretary-General on the agenda items under consideration, contained in document A/60/539 and dated 7 November 2005, draws attention to the fact that the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people in 2004 remained grave. About half lived below the official poverty line of $2.10 per day, compared to just 22 per cent in 2000. Furthermore, 16 per cent of Palestinians — approximately 560,000 people — were in deep poverty. Unemployment increased more than threefold since 2000, reaching a figure of 238,000 unemployed in 2004, largely as a result of roadblocks on roads within and leading to the occupied Palestinian territory. Palestinians continued to face problems reaching their places of work, schools and hospitals, and standards of health and education continued to deteriorate. In some parts of the territory, Palestinians' needs for additional humanitarian assistance rose sharply as a consequence.

The report of the Secretary-General also expresses concern over Israel's continued settlement expansion and unilateral construction of the wall in the West Bank. It points out that lack of action to remove illegal settlement outposts erected since 2001 has severely undermined trust in Israel's intentions and that Government-sponsored settlement activity has a negative impact on the territorial contiguity of Palestinian territory and thus remains a source of serious concern.

According to the road map, Israel has an obligation to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, and immediately dismantle outposts erected illegally since March 2001. The report also states that Israel continues its unilateral construction of the wall on Palestinian land and that, along with continued Israeli settlement activity, this constitutes a key challenge to the fulfilment of the road map's goal of a two-State solution.

At this critical stage, it is all the more important for the international community to take steps for the smooth implementation of Palestinian trade and transit access, both within its territories and with the outside world. It is equally important for Israel to stop settlement activity, lift curfews and ease restrictions on the movement of persons and goods and thereby significantly improve the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories. Israel's actions should not prejudge final status issues or threaten longer-term prospects for peace by making the creation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State much more difficult.

The problem is that settlement activity leads to cantonization and changes patterns of transportation and access. The wall's encroachment on Palestinian land and interests creates great hardships for the Palestinian people affected by its construction and exacerbates the situation by placing populations, agricultural land and a part of the West Bank aquifer beyond their reach. Moreover, the continued construction of the wall on Palestinian land threatens to prejudge the eventual outcome of the final status negotiations between the parties. We therefore reiterate our call on Israel to abide by its legal obligations as set forth in the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and resolution ES-10/15 of the General Assembly.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority has to shoulder its responsibility by undertaking action on the ground to halt violence. As the report of the Secretary-General points out, the Palestinian Authority must push ahead with efforts to reform the Palestinian security services. Decisive action in that regard should help to restore law and order.

Over the years, India has assisted the Palestinian Authority through development projects and human resources development. Indian assistance projects in the Palestinian Authority include the construction and establishment of the Jawaharlal Nehru Library at the Al-Azhar University in Gaza City and the Mahatma Gandhi Library and student activity centre at the Palestinian Technical College at Deir Al-Balah in the Gaza Strip.

During the visit of President Abbas to India in May 2005, the Prime Minister of India announced a grant of $15 million to Palestine for developmental projects, in addition to a grant announced earlier this year. Those grants will, inter alia, fund hospitals and information technology centres in Gaza and Ramallah, an Indian Chair at Al-Quds University and a school in Abu Dis.

We wish also to recall the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, who passed away on 11 November 2004. For nearly four decades, he represented the national aspirations of the Palestinian people. On this occasion, we wish to pay homage to his memory and recall his everlasting contribution to the Palestinian cause.

We urge both Palestinians and Israelis to make optimal use of the opportunities provided by that new beginning. The ceasefire concluded at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in February 2005 has broadly survived, resulting in a noticeable improvement in the security situation, marked by a decrease in the number of deaths since then. It is necessary to renew and redouble efforts so the peace process can move forward in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Quartet's road map and international law. The international community must press both parties to renew parallel action on their obligations under the road map, which constitutes for both Israel and the Palestinians the best opportunity to move beyond the conflict towards peace, security and prosperity. The international community must also continue to assist the parties to simultaneously address economic, humanitarian, security and political issues.

Mr. Cabral (Guinea-Bissau), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We hope that a negotiated solution to end the conflict will be quickly found. The vision of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders remains as valid as at any other time — and that vision is perhaps more attainable now. India urges the parties concerned and the international community to press for a just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict and the broader achievement of peace, security and stability for the entire region at the earliest possible time, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

India has advocated a comprehensive solution to the situation in the Middle East as the logical next step in the resolution of the wider Israeli-Arab conflict at the regional level, as envisaged by the Saudi Arabian peace initiative. The principle of land for peace is equally valid in addressing the other tracks of the Middle East conflict. We sincerely hope that the comprehensive political process can be revived at the earliest possible time.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*A/60/35*) under consideration by the Assembly today describes in a lucid and impartial fashion the tragic situation in which the Palestinian people continue to live in their homeland, occupied by Israel. The report places our consideration of the Palestinian question in a particularly worrisome context. It shows — if it were still necessary to do so — that it is essential that the Committee pursue its work and activities in accordance with its mandate as long as Israel continues to occupy Palestinian territories and persists in its flagrant violations of international law.

The year that has just ended has been marked by Israel's pursuit of its policy of colonization and repression, leaving a trail of atrocities, abuses and confiscations in its wake. Amid that atmosphere of death and destruction, a glimmer of hope appeared with Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. For this withdrawal to mark a genuine break with the past and to relaunch the dynamic of peace, it must be part of the broader framework of the road map, opening the way to the withdrawal of Israel forces and the dismantlement of all settlements in the West Bank and around Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The continuing construction of the separation wall, the intensification and expansion of settlement activities in the West Bank and the continued isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank remain sources of grave concern for my delegation and give rise to serious misgivings about Israel's real intentions with respect to the final status of the territory. Through those measures, Israel is, in reality, drawing a new map of the occupied territories on the ground, thus severely compromising the chances of a future independent Palestinian State. Those measures further jeopardize the integrity and the territorial contiguity of the future State.

My country reaffirms its principled position that the settlements and the wall being constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, violate international law and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and are contrary to the provisions of the road map.

My country is deeply concerned about the very serious deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and social aspects of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, and we reiterate our strong condemnation of the inhuman practices of the Israeli army against the Palestinians, their property and their institutions.

Today, on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People — who have now seen another milestone in this long period of destruction and injustice — my country, Algeria, reaffirms its firm support for the struggle of that brave people to achieve their inalienable national rights.

The time has come for the international community to shoulder its responsibilities and put an end to the Israeli policy of occupation. The Security Council has recently been seen acting with uncommon speed, vigour and effectiveness to bring about a withdrawal of foreign forces in that same region. If the Council wishes to maintain its credibility in the eyes of the international community, it must act with the same resolve, including by invoking Chapter VII of the Charter, to ensure that Israel withdraws unconditionally and without delay from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, in compliance with international law. The withdrawal should be accompanied by the total and unconditional

freeze of settlement activity throughout the occupied Palestinian territories and the cessation of the wall's construction, as well as by the demolition of those sections that have already been completed, in accordance with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and as endorsed by the Assembly. Those actions would ensure a successful outcome to the withdrawal from Gaza and a serious resumption of negotiations on the issue of final status, which has been postponed for too long.

The international community, represented by the Quartet, is called upon to become further engaged in order to bring a lasting and just solution to the Middle East conflict based on compliance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and 1544 (2004), the principle of land for peace and full implementation of the road map endorsed by the Security Council.

While reaffirming my country's support for a peaceful, negotiated solution based on international law, as President Abdelaziz Bouteflika solemnly recalled at the Summit of South American and Arab Countries held in Brasilia in May 2005, we are more convinced than ever that a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict must be based on an end to the occupation and the withdrawal of the Israeli army from all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and the last remaining occupied enclave in Lebanon, the cessation of all settlement activities throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, the dismantling of existing settlements, the cessation of the building of the separation wall and the renunciation of all policies tending to inflame passions and jeopardize the success of the peace process.

The Assembly must respond adequately to the rational aspiration of the Palestinian people to recover their legitimate rights, in particular the right to self-determination and the right to create their own independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): The debate on the question of Palestine coincides with the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. When the General Assembly adopted resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977 establishing the International Day, no one had any doubt that the Assembly was aware of its responsibilities towards the Palestinian people and their hardships or that it was aware of the need to work tirelessly to find a comprehensive and just solution to the question of Palestine. The observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is of special importance because it affords the international community an opportunity to renew that commitment.

My delegation thanks the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their commendable efforts with respect to the question of Palestine and for their important annual report (*A/60/35*). We thank the Chairman and the members of the Committee for their efforts. We are aware of the difficulties they face in the examination and analysis of the facts of this important issue as they seek to help the Palestinian people exercise their inalienable rights.

The Committee's report illustrates several points that had been ambiguous due to efforts to distort and conceal the facts. Continued illegal actions exacerbate the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Our concern about settlement expansion and the construction of the illegal separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territories is growing more acute because of the intensified expansion of existing settlements and the building of new ones, and the accelerated pace to complete the construction of the separation wall.

According to the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, contained in document A/60/271, the construction of the wall and the expansion of the settlements — two outcomes of the occupation — are two factors that undermine the fundamental right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

The violation of all other rights of the Palestinians derives from the violation of that fundamental right of self-determination, since occupation by its very nature leads to human rights violations. Those violations take place before the eyes of the international community, in contravention of international law and instruments and international decisions and resolutions, including Security Council resolution 446 (1979) on the issue of Israeli settlements and the lack of any legal basis for the construction of such settlements. Council resolution 465 (1980) calls for existing settlements to be dismantled.

Israel's policy and practices with respect to the settlements and its welcoming of new immigrants to them is in flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. The continuation of those practices seriously impedes the implementation of a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in the Middle East. Likewise, such practices are in violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004, which states that the building of the separation wall is illegal and calls for its dismantlement.

Rather than comply with international law, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and United Nations resolutions, Israel continues to build and expand settlements in the West Bank, in violation of article 49, paragraph 6, of the Fourth Geneva Convention. That practice continues without interruption even before Israel carries out a new plan that would establish the largest settlement project, resulting in the confiscation of territory in the West Bank that exceeds the Gaza Strip in size. Those construction activities have continued in flagrant violation of international instruments and the Quartet's road map, and, as the Special Rapporteur notes in his report, will create a situation in which the road map will become essentially meaningless.

No one doubts that the situation is worsening as a result of the occupying Power's ongoing construction of the separation wall in the West Bank, which has been condemned by the international community. In addition, the construction of the separation wall around Jerusalem violates Security Council resolution 476 (1980), which rejected laws adopted by the Israeli parliament to make Jerusalem the permanent capital of Israel, and resolution 478 (1980) of 20 August 1980, which reaffirmed the Council's determination that all legislative and administrative measures that have sought to alter the character and status of Jerusalem, in particular the basic law on Jerusalem and other such decisions, are null and void.

It appears that Israel is building the separation wall in the West Bank and around Jerusalem in an attempt to achieve its expansionist aims in occupied Palestinian territory. That can be seen from the commitment made by the Prime Minister of Israel, during the High-level Meeting on 15 September, to complete the construction of the separation wall. That declaration prompted the Palestinian Rights Committee to reiterate in its report its concern that Israel was attempting to unilaterally define the future borders of the Palestinian State.

Among the separation wall's negative consequences are its effects on the economic and social situation of the Palestinians. The destruction of Palestinian land and property has irreversible consequences and will undermine the ability of Palestinians to rebuild and revitalize their economy, which has become more fragile since September 2000.

Palestinians have spared no effort to end the tragic situation. They have signed peace agreements. Arab leaders as well have explored all avenues in the quest for a comprehensive and just peace in the region and have endorsed various peace initiatives reflecting that approach, such as the Arab peace initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut summit.

The withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip was welcomed as an indicator of further steps to be taken. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People confirmed that the withdrawal could help revive peace negotiations within the context of the road map, with the goal of creating an independent, contiguous Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

The road map remains the logical and proper framework for achieving a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question based on the 4 June 1967 borders and implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): The debate on the question of Palestine is particularly important, as it deals with an issue that has serious humanitarian and security implications. It is indeed a painful exercise to discuss an issue such as the question of Palestine, which involves grave injustice, repression and suffering that surpasses all limits.

The report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (*A/60/380*) and the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*A/60/35*) state that the situation is indeed a painful one of limitless suffering. The continued construction of the separation wall, in spite of its illegality according to the advisory opinion of the

International Court of Justice, has led to the annexation of even more Palestinian territory and has created isolated plots of land where freedom of movement of Palestinians is prevented. Family members cannot visit one another, and health care and educational institutions have become inaccessible. The problems created by the wall have increased the suffering of women, children and the elderly, who are deprived of medical attention and access to education.

Palestinians are forced into living on destroyed plots or are displaced as a result of continued military aggression, house demolitions, the uprooting of trees, the destruction of infrastructure, the closure of roads and crossings, the intensification of sieges and the increase in Israeli settlement activities. Israeli actions target entire communities, preventing people from practising their livelihoods, from attending schools and universities or visiting health and social institutions. As a result, poverty is exacerbated among the Palestinians, causing economic hardship and deteriorating living conditions. Israel progressively and systematically seeks to crush and obliterate all the elements that would help in the creation of a future State of Palestine as a contiguous geographical entity and a viable State, which would be a factor in consolidating peace and stability in the region and the world.

This year's debate on the question of Palestine comes after the issuance of the report of the Special Committee, which describes the feelings of despair that exist in the region as a result of the suffering among Palestinians caused by Israeli practices. The international community has the responsibility to spare no effort to put an end to the Israeli practices and measures against the unarmed Palestinian population. It must also ensure that Israel complies with its agreements and international resolutions, allows the Palestinian elections to proceed on time and according to plan and to be successful, allows all Palestinians, including the inhabitants of East Jerusalem, to participate in the elections, lifts the blockades unconditionally imposed on the Palestinian people and ends the construction of the racist separation wall, dismantling those sections that have already been completed.

Israel must end all colonial settlement planning and activities and withdraw from the territories it has occupied since 1967 in Palestine, the Syrian Golan and the Shaba'a farms area in southern Lebanon.

The international community must also reject as illegitimate all Israeli resolutions and measures that are contrary to international legitimacy, including all attempts to undermine the sovereignty of the Holy City, which will be the capital of the Palestinian State. A just solution to the refugee problem must be found, in accordance with international resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The Palestinian people must be allowed to establish an independent State on their national soil.

The world's hopes were revived following Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip as a first step. The international community must now put further pressure on Israel to push it along that same track and take further steps to withdraw to the borders of 4 June 1967 in order to achieve a lasting, comprehensive and just settlement of the conflict, based on the belief that all individuals have the right to live in peace and not at the expense of others. The settlement must be based as well on a return to the peace process in conformity with the Arab peace initiative, the Madrid Conference, the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, the road map and the principle of land for peace so that the Palestinian people can create an independent State on their national soil.

We commend the recent efforts of the Secretary of State of the United States, which led to an agreement on the freedom of movement at Palestinian crossings, as well as the efforts of the Quartet to advance the peace process in the region.

Ms. Nuñez Mordoche (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The consideration of the items on the Assembly's agenda at today's joint debate takes on special importance during this month of November, as much because of recent events in the Middle East as because of the historic events currently being commemorated. Only a few days ago, on 11 November, we commemorated the first anniversary of the passing of Yasser Arafat. The historic leader of the Palestinians died before seeing his and his people's great dream realized. The establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital remains a chimera.

In addition, today we are celebrating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a date on which all peoples and Governments of goodwill extend their support to that heroic people

in their efforts to achieve independence and self-determination.

However, instability continues in the Middle East, a situation characterized by the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the ongoing foreign occupation of Iraq and the threats being prepared against Syria, which make use of inconsistencies orchestrated in the Security Council.

In the past we had the opportunity to be informed of the situation prevailing in the occupied Arab territories thanks to the valuable and dedicated work of the various bodies established by the Organization to investigate actions committed against the Palestinian people and to alleviate their suffering.

The statistics speak for themselves. From 1 January to 19 August 2005 — in just seven and a half months — 146 Palestinians died in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Since the beginning of the second intifada, 3,663 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces. The destructive fury of Israeli bulldozers has expelled more than 16,000 Palestinians from their homes in the past year. Clearly, an entire people is being massacred in a flagrant, massive and systematic manner.

In spite of its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, Israel continues to illegally occupy or control great expanses of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territory, while failing to heed the numerous resolutions of the Assembly and the Security Council demanding the return of those territories. In that context, Cuba wishes to reaffirm the need for full compliance, without exception or discrimination, with all Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the situation in the Middle East, especially Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

It is also worth mentioning that the Security Council has experienced ongoing obstruction by the United States with regard to this issue, especially during the last five years of Republican Administration. The historic tally of the Security Council's work includes 29 vetoes, with many threats of more, in instances when the Council has attempted to adopt a draft resolution that would contribute to ending the massacre of an entire people. The customary application of double standards and the vetoes and threats of veto to which I referred have simply led to stagnation in the Council as regards this matter.

As we have said before, we should not be confused by the recent unilateral withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and the evacuation of settlements there. We should not think that that is the beginning of the end of Israel's genocidal policy in the area or that it represents a way to reach a definitive solution to the Palestinian issue. Israel continues to control the airspace, the territorial borders and the sea. Israel continues to be the occupying Power exercising control over the area.

Israel is also continuing to build the illegal separation wall, confiscating arable land from the future State of Palestine, separating families and impeding the freedom of movement. The wall has left more than 20,000 Palestinians without a way to earn a living and has stripped them of their patrimony. It has also led to the confiscation of thousands of hectares of land and water wells in the West Bank, which is tantamount to the de facto seizure of approximately 60 per cent of the territory, including East Jerusalem. Entire Palestinian areas have been deprived access to vital basic services, including education, health and employment.

The provisions of resolution ES-10/15 have also been ignored. In quoting the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, resolution ES-10/15 states, in its twentieth preambular paragraph, that

> "The construction of the wall being built by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and its associated regime, are contrary to international law".

The United Nations should continue to work to achieve just and lasting peace in the region. The international community and this Organization have long owed the Palestinian people its own State. All the time and resources devoted to that goal are insignificant compared to the debt owed by humankind to that suffering and heroic people. In that undertaking — as necessary as it is urgent — Cuba is making its usual constructive contribution and extends its support and solidarity to the United Nations and the international community.

Our own country, which has been subjected to a harsh blockade by the Government of the United States for over 45 years, is convinced that no wall, fence, or repression — however violent or inhumane — is capable of breaking the Palestinian people's ardent

desire for sovereignty and independence. It is for that reason that, thanks to our experience during more than 45 years of resistance, Cuba supports a peaceful and negotiated solution to the Palestinian issue. Cuba would also like to reiterate its strong support for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also demand the unconditional return of all Arab territories occupied by Israel, and we reaffirm the illegal character of all Israeli settlements in Arab territories occupied since 1967, including the occupied Syrian Golan.

In conclusion, Cuba calls upon all delegations to vote in favour of the draft resolutions introduced under the two agenda items under consideration, thereby expressing their unwavering support to the just cause of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Abdelbari (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The question of Palestine, which is at the heart of the conflict in the Middle East, is undoubtedly a focal point for the entire world. The Palestinian tragedy has become a tragedy for the human conscience. The deteriorating security situation and the continuing escalation of violence speak loudly to every human conscience and call for a firm stand against Israeli arrogance and intransigence.

Israel's arrogant attitude vis-à-vis resolutions of international legitimacy, on the one hand, and the international community's lenience, on the other, have led Israel to commit massacres and barbaric acts against civilians and unarmed innocent people in all Palestinian areas, especially in the Gaza Strip following the so-called withdrawal. They have even led Israel to brutalize the Palestinian people with complete impunity and to reject all relevant international resolutions.

The steadfast Palestinian people continues to face unjust Israeli practices and policies. Homes are demolished with their inhabitants inside; land is confiscated; elderly persons, the young, women, children and other unarmed Palestinians are killed. More important and grave is the fact that Israel is continuing to build its illegal wall on usurped Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem. Israel is continuing its wanton aggression by destroying homes and confiscating land, in clear and direct violation of international law, international humanitarian law and other international human rights instruments.

Israel is also continuing to disregard General Assembly resolution ES-10/15, adopted at the tenth emergency special session, as well as the International Court of Justice advisory opinion on the wall it is building. The Court has declared that wall illegal and has called for Israel to immediately cease its construction and to demolish what has already been built, to repeal all legislation relating to the wall and to pay compensation to those who have been harmed by it.

The credibility of this Organization should be reflected in its ability to uphold the Charter and implement international law. The fact that this matter has not been resolved is a testament to the existence of a policy of double standards and selectivity in the application of Security Council resolutions and international law as adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

That fact also attests to the shameful silence that exists with regard to a clear violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of the principles of international humanitarian law, in particular the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, and other agreements.

It is incumbent upon all concerned to oblige Israel fully to withdraw from Arab territories occupied since 4 June 1967, including Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as the Shaba'a Farms in Lebanon, in implementation of the principle of land for peace and of the relevant United Nations resolutions, foremost among which are General Assembly resolution 181 (II) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), and in keeping with the decisions taken at Oslo and Madrid, other relevant Security Council resolutions, and the road map that has been agreed to by all.

My delegation would like to urge the international community and its member States urgently to provide economic and technical assistance to the Palestinian people and to the Palestinian National Authority during this delicate phase in order to help alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people and to enable it to rebuild its economy and the basic infrastructure of the State of Palestine.

We would like also to reiterate our unswerving support for the Palestinian cause and for the draft resolutions submitted to the General Assembly in that regard. We would like also to urge all Member States to take the same stance as they have in the past.

Mr. O'Brien (United States of America): The United States remains firmly committed to achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We welcomed the successful withdrawal of Israeli settlers from the northern West Bank and Gaza earlier this year. United States efforts continue to focus on sustaining momentum on economic and security issues after disengagement in order to make progress along the road map towards President Bush's vision of a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The 15 November agreement on movement and access between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is an important step forward. For the first time since 1967, Palestinians will control access at the Rafah crossing, which opened on 25 November. We will continue to work via the Quartet Special Envoy and United States Security Coordinator missions on the economic and security agenda and maintain the momentum for disengagement. The Quartet's recent decision to extend the Special Envoy mission through March 2006 and the President's recent nomination of Major General Keith Dayton to serve as our new Security Coordinator in the region highlight our continued commitment in that regard.

All parties have obligations that they must fulfil in order to achieve the objective of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. While the United States shares concerns about the hardships facing the Palestinian people, the draft resolutions that the General Assembly will consider today and tomorrow reflect neither the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict nor the need for both parties to take steps to advance the goal of peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The General Assembly is being asked to view events in the region through the distorted lens of one-sided perceptions. Endorsing draft resolutions that condemn Israeli actions but fail to address Palestinian actions or inaction has real consequences. One-sided draft resolutions such as the ones before us today undermine the ability of the United Nations to play a constructive role in furthering peace.

Specifically, in the view of the United States, the 1975 mandate establishing the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the 1977 mandate establishing the Division for Palestinian Rights within the Secretariat perpetuate a skewed and biased approach to the Middle East conflict. Those bodies reflect a cold-war era gone by and have long since outlived whatever usefulness they may once have had. Member States should eliminate those bodies and seek ways to reinvigorate the United Nations as an even-handed partner in seeking peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, committed to the road map and to the realization of the two-State vision.

During this sixtieth session of the General Assembly, as the United Nations considers historic steps to reform itself and its institutions to better face the challenges of a new century, it must examine old mandates such as these with a critical eye and confront the reality that the time for such bodies has passed.

The United States would welcome a draft resolution that reflected a balanced and pragmatic approach consistent with that of the Quartet. Unfortunately, it appears that we will be considering texts that put the General Assembly in the position of attempting to prejudge and prejudice the settlement of final status issues. To achieve a just and lasting peace, those issues must be decided through negotiations between the parties themselves, consistent with their past agreements and with the relevant Security Council resolutions. Therefore, we will not support these unbalanced draft resolutions, which do nothing to further the cause of peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and we urge other Member States to withhold their support as well.

Mr. Sallam (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People confirms reports of the perpetration by the Israeli occupying Power of inhumane acts against the Palestinian people and the tragic situation of the Palestinian people, trapped in their own territory and suffering all types of repression, including acts of violence and assassinations.

After 38 years, the Israeli occupation continues to bear down on the Palestinian people. Their standard of living continues to deteriorate, as does their security, economic and social situation, because of Israeli

policies and practices that violate international and customary humanitarian law.

Despite all the international efforts deployed by the Quartet, which led to the road map as a means of settling the conflict by providing a timetable for the granting to the Palestinian people of their legitimate political rights, Israel continues obdurately to refuse to yield and to reject one initiative after the other. It has refused to resume negotiations, and it continues to erect obstacles and to create new realities on the ground in order to prevent the resumption of negotiations, showing a great indifference to the continuing cycle of violence, tension and instability in the region.

The policies and arbitrary actions carried out by the Israeli Government will not bring security to the Israeli people; to the contrary, they only increase the level of violence and suffering for the victims, threatening stability in the region while dispelling any hope for peace. Security cannot be achieved by confiscating land, denying rights, murdering neighbours, demolishing houses and destroying crops and farm lands, thereby making people hungry and preventing them from earning a living. Security cannot by achieved by arrogantly announcing lists of Palestinian political activists whom the Israeli Government intends to assassinate or by defying the hundreds of United Nations decisions concerning Israel's practices and activities, its flouting of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, its contempt for international resolutions on Jerusalem and its refusal to recognize resolutions concerning the deportation of civilians and the protection of Palestinian rights and people.

The path towards the settlement of international disputes can be found only by complying with the resolutions and principles of international legality. That is the only way to reduce tension and to prevent frustration and despair from reaching the boiling point as a result of occupation, injustice and aggression. We must work together to find a comprehensive and just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, we must mobilize all our efforts to lend renewed impetus to the peace process in the Middle East, which has been stagnant for so long because of the double standards and selectivity that gave rise to continued violations of international resolutions and principles.

Saudi Arabia reaffirms its full support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to recover all its legitimate political rights. We call upon Israel to honour its commitments and to abide by Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), together with all other relevant international resolutions concerning the Palestinian question. These include the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative, bilateral agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and the road map with all its provisions. Furthermore, we call upon Israel to stop tormenting the Palestinian people, to stop building the separation wall and to release Palestinian detainees.

Saudi Arabia believes that Israel's pullout from Gaza is a first step that should be followed by additional steps, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, in order to pave the way for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on Palestinian territory with East Jerusalem as its capital. We call for the resumption of the peace process so that Israel can withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders and from other occupied Arab territories in southern Lebanon with a view to a negotiated and comprehensive solution aimed at establishing a lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the region, which can lead to a Middle East free from weapons of mass destruction.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker on the list for agenda item 15 at this meeting. One delegation has asked to speak in right of reply.

I now give the floor to the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): My delegation did not intend to take the floor again after the statement of our Minister for Foreign Affairs. However, we found ourselves in a position to respond to some of the comments made by a delegation that asked for the elimination of two important Committees established through General Assembly resolutions. That delegation also asked the Assembly to re-examine the mandate of those two Committees.

We believe that, on the basis of democracy and acceptance of the will of the Member States of the General Assembly, programmes related to Palestine are evaluated in a democratic manner by the entire membership of the General Assembly. It has been the will of the overwhelming majority of the Assembly to decide every year to extend the mandates of those

important Committees and programmes until a just solution to the question of Palestine can be found on the basis of the will of the international community.

Furthermore, we were surprised to hear a statement suggesting that a General Assembly resolution prejudged the settlement in the Middle East. So is it that Assembly resolutions reflecting international law and reiterating principles of international law prejudge the settlement, while illegal settlements on the ground, illegal construction of the wall and the illegal actions carried out by the Israeli occupying Power in suppressing the Palestinian people and in committing oppressive and abhorrent violations of the rights of the Palestinian people do not prejudge the settlement? We leave it up to all countries and their delegations to make a true and accurate determination as to what is really correct, what is fair, what is one-sided and what is balanced.

I wish to conclude by referring to two other issues. First, the position of the delegation to which I just referred is, frankly speaking, extremely political. It is a traditional position that shields Israel from the wall of all the relevant decisions of the international community and from international law. That position, shielding the wrong thing — the illegal acts that Israel is committing — is what allows Israel to continue its intransigence in refusing to fulfil its Charter obligations and to implement all those resolutions.

Secondly, the statement and the position of that delegation are, frankly speaking, anti-Palestinian. We have been very positive in our attitude towards establishing a relationship and carrying out dialogue and meetings in good faith with that specific country, in the spirit of implementing United Nations and Security Council resolutions and the mandate of the Quartet. But I find that statement — which I cannot describe in any other way than as anti-Palestinian — very unfortunate, especially as we are extending our hand in a positive way to that country in order to establish a very positive relationship and so that that country can take a balanced and fair position with regard to the conflict. As we have heard it expressed this evening, we find that anti-Palestinian position very unfortunate. We hope that country will reconsider its position in future interventions.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 37 for this meeting.

Programme of work

I should like to remind members that the General Assembly will continue consideration of agenda item 17, "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security", and sub-item (e) of agenda item 73, "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan", tomorrow morning at 10 a.m., as the first item. As members will recall there were speakers still remaining on the list at this morning's debate.

The Assembly will also resume its consideration of agenda item 41, "Report of the Economic and Social Council", to take action on draft resolutions A/60/L.21 and A/60/L.24. After that, we will continue debate on agenda item 15.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

United Nations A/60/PV.58

General Assembly
Sixtieth session

Official Records

58th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 30 November 2005, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Poukré-Kono (Central African Republic), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda items 17 and 73 (*continued*)

The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(e) Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction in war-stricken Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/224)

Draft resolution (A/60/L.27)

Mr. Ilkin (Turkey): Turkey has already aligned itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. In light of Turkey's deep-rooted historical and friendly ties with Afghanistan, I would like to take the floor to further highlight a number of points with regard to my country's views and endeavours concerning Afghanistan.

Let me first underline that Turkey is a sponsor of the present draft resolution, which we feel objectively reflects both the successes achieved and certain challenges encountered in the implementation of the Bonn Agreement. We expect that the text as a whole will convey a strong message of solidarity with the Afghan people and at the same time reaffirm the determination and commitment of the international community to remain seized of the developments.

We welcome the parliamentary and provincial council elections of 18 September, which constitute an important milestone in the development of democracy in Afghanistan. "Afghanistan for Afghans" has always been Turkey's motto. Turkey firmly believes that an all-embracing Afghan identity is the key to stability and prosperity for this friendly country. Turkey attaches great importance to the national unity and territorial integrity of Afghanistan.

As representative of a country that has twice led the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, for a total of 14 months in the last three years, I also wish to reiterate Turkey's continued commitment to helping achieve lasting peace and security in that country. In this respect, we believe that building a national army and a national police force is crucial, not only for Afghanistan's long-term security, but also for the national unity of the country. With this understanding, Turkey has also contributed to the establishment of a national army and police force by supporting relevant procurement and training programmes in both Turkey and Afghanistan.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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Our support for Afghanistan is not confined to the military and security fields alone. Turkey has also been actively involved in the social, health, education and agriculture sectors. In this context, Turkey believes that the expeditious implementation of reconstruction projects is of great importance for Afghanistan. Turkish firms and construction companies are actively involved in carrying out some of these projects.

Combating drug production and illicit trafficking constitutes one of Afghanistan's top priorities. The creation of alternative means of making a living, which will offer new opportunities to the Afghan people, is imperative in achieving this goal. The eradication of poppy fields should be seen in this larger context.

It is evident that a democratic, united and prosperous Afghanistan will set an excellent example for other countries and peoples going through similar experiences and difficulties. Thus, neither Afghanistan nor the international community can afford to fail. Let me commend the untiring and dedicated work of both the Afghan leadership and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in responding to the great challenges ahead. Let me also reiterate the strong commitment of the Turkish Government to the security, unity, reconstruction and welfare of Afghanistan.

Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, let me note that the delegation of Uzbekistan fully endorses the ideas contained in the statement of the delegation of the People's Republic of China on behalf of the member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Uzbekistan welcomes the considerable economic and political successes achieved in the past year by the Government of Afghanistan in the reconstruction of that country, including the holding of parliamentary elections and the continuing establishment of institutions of State administration, including such elements as the army, law enforcement agencies and the judicial system.

Clearly, the international community is playing a considerable role in positive developments, in particular in the implementation of the Bonn process. Our country, as one of Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, shares with it a centuries-long history of good-neighbourly relations and is truly interested in the re-establishment of a peaceful, stable Afghan State. Viewing this country as an integral part of the Central Asian space, Uzbekistan actively advocates including it in regional integration processes.

Given the level of understanding achieved by the international community with respect to the use of existing resources and the experience acquired by neighbouring countries whose capacity could be used to rebuild the Afghan economy, I would like to note briefly the contribution of Uzbekistan in this area.

Based on the growing legal foundation for Uzbek-Afghan cooperation, our country is providing assistance to the Afghan people in reconstructing and building its infrastructure, including road and transportation lines, water management and energy facilities, and irrigation structures. For a number of years now, a mechanism established jointly with the United Nations to coordinate the flow of goods from international organizations and donor countries has been functioning successfully. This flow has reached the point where it now represents many millions of dollars. Accordingly, Uzbekistan has reduced the cost of transporting goods to Afghanistan and is carrying out measures to enhance the service infrastructure.

Taking into account the social and economic importance that the Afghan leadership attaches to providing electricity to northern and central Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is providing uninterrupted delivery of electricity to its neighbour.

An important element in ensuring the success of Uzbek-Afghan cooperation is the fact that the relevant Uzbek agencies have 30 years of experience in working in Afghanistan in the area of economic development. We have sufficient numbers of highly qualified experts who speak the languages of the peoples living in Afghanistan. The transportation infrastructure network that has been developed and the territorial proximity of Afghanistan make it possible to minimize the costs and time required to deliver necessary goods to that country.

Given the broad practical experience of Uzbekistan's experts and the fact that we have prepared draft documentation for water and irrigation facilities for the northern part of Afghanistan, my country has the capability to organize the work to restore Afghanistan's water supply systems. Our experts have developed a project to supply water to the cities and main inhabited areas of the provinces of Balkh, Baghlan, Badghis, Jowzjan, Kondoz, Samangan, Takhar, Faryab and Herat. With that capability, Uzbekistan is prepared to expand its cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan in other areas,

including geological prospecting and the laying of local and international telecommunication lines linked to international fibre optics communication lines.

The presence of transportation links is playing a special role with regard to diversifying the process to improve the social and economic situation in Afghanistan and developing integration processes. In that connection, we wish to draw the Assembly's attention to the importance of implementing the initiative to establish an international trans-Afghan transportation corridor. Such an example of economic cooperation is in the interests of both Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, as well as of the entire international community.

Despite the progress made in Afghanistan in social development, there are nevertheless concerns about ongoing problems in the area of security. We have expressed our concern with regard to the growth in terrorist activities by the Taliban and other terrorist groups.

A key element to strengthening stability in the country is integrating Afghanistan into the Central Asian political and economic system. We look forward to Afghanistan's increased participation in the process to establish a regional common market. In the middle and long terms, it will be important to include Afghanistan as an observer country in the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

There is growing concern among the international community and the States of the region about the rise in the production of drugs in Afghanistan. In countering that threat, in addition to establishing security belts around the country, it is very important to bring about profound structural reforms in the Afghan economy. Without such reforms, the nexus between drugs and terrorism will continue to be a major threat to Afghanistan's national security and to the Government's effective functioning. The establishment in Central Asia of a regional information and coordination centre to combat transboundary crime related to the illicit trafficking in drugs will also be an effective step towards tackling the scourge of drugs, given the fact that the region is on the front lines of the fight against the flow of drugs.

For the sake of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan, the international community must now deliver on the pledges of assistance to the Government of Afghanistan made by donors at the Tokyo and Berlin Conferences. Moreover, we once again join the appeal made in the final communiqué issued by the meeting of foreign ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference held here in New York on 23 September 2005 (*A/60/440*). The ministers called on Member States that had made pledges to the Afghan People Assistance Fund to expedite the remittance of their donations in order to strengthen the Fund's resources thereby making it possible for it to more effectively contribute to the achievement of its intended noble humanitarian goals.

Given the foregoing, Uzbekistan welcomes the draft resolution on Afghanistan introduced yesterday by the delegation of Germany. We hope that its adoption by consensus will once again confirm the international community's readiness to do its utmost to assist in the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Mr. Shata (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to participate in the debate on agenda item 17, entitled "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security", and sub-item (e) of agenda item 73, entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan". At the outset, I should like to join my colleagues in thanking the Secretary-General for his report on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (*A/60/224*).

Afghanistan has made great progress in recent years in the peacebuilding and reconstruction process. However, we must not forget that, like other countries emerging from decades of internal strife, it needs the ongoing support of the international community in all areas. The encouraging achievements made in Afghanistan must be continued and promoted, especially with regard to security, economic and social development, the fight against drugs, the rebuilding of Afghan civil institutions and the work with the international community to tackle terrorism and end that scourge, which threatens international peace and security.

Based on our desire to achieve stability, security and peace in Afghanistan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has not failed to assist that fraternal country. At the January 2002 Tokyo Conference, Saudi Arabia announced its contribution of $200 million through the Saudi Development Fund, as well as $20 million to support the Afghan budget. That amount has been

remitted to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which is managed by the World Bank. Those funds were in addition to the $1 million pledged to support the United Nations programme to cover the wages of the staff of the Afghan Interim Authority. Of the $200 million, $30 million were earmarked for the Kabul-Kandahar-Herat road project on 10 August 2003. An agreement to devote $20 million to other road construction projects in Afghanistan was also signed.

We have also pledged $60 million to official and unofficial humanitarian assistance. During the Berlin Conference, held on 31 March and 1 April 2004, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia pledged an additional $10 million for the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. That was in addition to the $150 million it pledged to the fund for development projects in health, education and infrastructure, in coordination with the Afghan Government.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is prepared to cooperate closely with the Government of Afghanistan in the interests of the two fraternal countries. We call upon the international community to continue its support to the fraternal Government and people of Afghanistan, so that they may play their rightful role in the community of nations and achieve stability, security and peace.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda items 17 and 73 (e).

The General Assembly will now proceed to consider draft resolution A/60/L.27, as orally revised.

The General Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/60/L.27, as orally revised. Draft resolution A/60/L.27 has two parts. Part A is entitled "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security", and part B is entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan".

Since the introduction of draft resolution A/60/L.27, Nepal has become a sponsor of the draft resolution.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.27, as orally revised?

Draft resolution A/60/L.27, as orally revised, was adopted (resolution 60/32).

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): Before giving the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote or position are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mrs. Núñez de Odremán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela did not object to the consensus on draft resolution A/60/L.27, as orally revised, because our country fully supports the efforts being made to achieve peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, we are deeply concerned about the fragility of the situation within Afghanistan because it works against political stability and the full exercise of the inalienable right of the people to self-determination. The situation is also being used as an argument to justify the presence on Afghan territory of forces of a foreign Power that in one way or another interfere in the internal affairs of that nation and its people.

In particular, we would like to note our reservation concerning the resolution's reference to the Operation Enduring Freedom coalition. It must be recalled that in Afghanistan, the principles of non-intervention and of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States were violated, because Operation Enduring Freedom was an intervention that set up a provisional Government in that country. At present, in Afghanistan there is a Government that was elected in 2004; parliamentary and provincial elections took place in 2005.

Nonetheless, references in the resolution to the Operation Enduring Freedom coalition attempt to endorse the use of force on Afghan territory and confer on the coalition an active role alongside the International Security Assistance Force, which was established by the United Nations to provide support in the areas of security, the rule of law, the fight against corruption, the fight against terrorism, peacebuilding, stability and the development of Afghanistan.

We consider that this once again reflects the way — biased, ambiguous and harmful vis-à-vis the Afghan people — in which the United Nations has approached emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken countries. That arises from the idea of a collapsed, failed or enfeebled

State and from a supposed right of the international community to determine the nature of the institutions that need to be built as alternatives for a State that has been stigmatized as having failed and being incapable of carrying out basic State functions.

But that right, as ensured by the United Nations Charter, belongs only to peoples in the exercise of their sovereign, inalienable right to self-determination. The manner in which the international community has taken action in that context is simply an act of intervention, especially when such actions do not decisively address the deep root causes of the current situation in Afghanistan, that is, its grave social and political problems, which the report of the Secretary-General on this item does not analyse in depth.

Our position on the resolution and on the report of the Secretary-General is that effective conflict prevention and the reconstruction of countries must be carried out through policies that promote the sustainable development of peoples, without losing sight of the fact that only the peoples themselves have the right to decide their destiny, because peace with foreign intervention but without development does not allow for the building of genuine democratic institutions.

Venezuela is convinced that there can be no stability without economic and social development. That is why we believe that the international community should provide unconditional support, in a spirit of solidarity with the Afghan people, so that they will have sufficient resources to resolve their problems on the basis of their own priorities and development programmes.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela can accept the use of force only in cases of legitimate self-defence. In view of all that I have said, our delegation did not sponsor the draft resolution, and we reiterate our reservations about its content.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the only speaker in explanation of position.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 17 and sub-item (e) of agenda item 73?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 41 (*continued*)

Report of the Economic and Social Council

Draft resolutions (A/60/L.21 and A/60/L.24)

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): Members will recall that the General Assembly held a debate on the agenda item at its 37th plenary meeting, held on 25 October 2005.

I now give the floor to the representative of Jamaica to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.21.

Mr. Neil (Jamaica): On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I have the honour to introduce for the consideration of the General Assembly the draft resolution entitled "Deferral of the smooth transition period for the graduation of Maldives from the list of least developed countries", which has been issued as document A/60/L.21.

On 26 December 2004, as we are all painfully aware, the Indian Ocean tsunami struck, causing death and destruction across two continents. The economic, social and environmental conditions of the Maldive islands changed fundamentally within a matter of hours. There was destruction and disruption on a scale difficult to imagine.

The tsunami occurred only just after the General Assembly had agreed that Maldives had reached a point in its fragile process of economic development at which it could be graduated from the category of least developed countries. It was one week before Maldives was to enter the agreed three-year period with a view to a smooth transition from the least-developed-country category.

Our fundamental assumption in making that decision was that, even with decreasing external assistance, Maldives would have been able to build on the advances that it had already made so that its economic and social gains would become increasingly self-sustaining. The Indian Ocean tsunami removed the basis of our assumption. No expert can now predict when Maldives will return to its pre-December 2004 situation, or even if it ever will. The Committee for Development Policy, on which this Assembly has come to rely for analysis and projections on the likely performance of the least developed countries, has indicated that it would not have a basis on which to

make a projection for Maldives in any reasonable time frame.

Owing to those uncertain circumstances there was an obvious need to make some adjustments by varying the terms of Assembly resolution 59/210 to meet the needs of a changed situation. That is of great importance for Maldives, but it is also important for us as a demonstration of solidarity with the people of Maldives at this time. They and their Government need our understanding, cooperation and support. Resource needs are still substantial if they are to meet the targets for reconstruction. We hope that the donor community will contribute generously towards rebuilding efforts.

The draft resolution contained in A/60/L.21 is straightforward. Essentially, the General Assembly would decide to defer for a period of three years the commencement of the three-year smooth transition period for the graduation of Maldives from the list of least developed countries. Paragraph 3 underlines the unique nature of the decision, resulting from the consequences of an unprecedented disaster. The draft resolution enjoys the support of all parties. We express appreciation for the cooperation and flexibility shown by our partners in the negotiation of the text.

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I commend the draft resolution to the General Assembly for adoption by consensus.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.24.

Mr. Choi Young-jin (Republic of Korea): I am pleased to remind the Assembly that in September our leaders reaffirmed that good governance is essential for sustainable development. They furthermore stated that sound economic policies, solid democratic institutions and improved infrastructure are the basis for the eradication of poverty and successful employment creation. It is my honour to report on the progress that Member States have made during the past two months to put that commitment into action in the form of a draft resolution.

On behalf of the sponsors, I would like to introduce the draft resolution contained in document A/60/L.24, entitled "Public administration and development", under agenda item 41, "Report of the Economic and Social Council". It highlights the importance of good governance, as well as transparent and accountable public administration, in achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

As the Secretary-General stated in his report on public administration and development (*A/60/114*), good governance and effective public administration systems are indeed essential elements for developing countries in reducing extreme poverty and achieving improved living standards. In this regard, the draft resolution emphasizes national efforts to improve governance, public administration and institutional and managerial capacities. At the same time, it encourages the international community to increase support for national efforts in public administration through North-South cooperation, South-South cooperation and public-private partnerships.

In addition, the draft resolution stresses the important role of the United Nations vis-à-vis information-sharing in public administration. It requests that the Secretary-General continue to facilitate the dissemination of information, knowledge and valuable practices in public administration through its existing network.

The draft resolution also requests the United Nations to maximize the effectiveness of its activities by strengthening partnerships with other international and regional organizations and by promoting the use of information and communication technologies as development tools.

Furthermore, the draft resolution reflects the outcome of the Seoul Declaration on Participatory and Transparent Governance, which was adopted at the Sixth Global Forum on Reinventing Government, held in Seoul in May 2005. It recognizes the importance of Government efforts to foster public participation in governance and development processes through the cooperation of all stakeholders within each society. It also requests all Member States to foster a culture of transparency, accountability and the rejection of corruption at all levels, consistent with the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Assembly that the draft text contained in A/60/L.24 has been revised slightly, by consensus, in two places, following consultations with Member States. The revisions apply to operative paragraph 5. Just before the phrase "through North-South cooperation", the word "particularly" would be replaced with

"including", and "inter alia" would be inserted after "public-private partnership to". Revised operative paragraph 5 would thus read:

> "Encourages the international community to increase support for national efforts, including those of developing countries, in public administration, including through North-South cooperation, South-South cooperation and public-private partnership to, inter alia, provide financial, educational, material and technical support and cooperation as appropriate".

I would like to take this opportunity to announce that, in addition to those countries listed in A/60/L.24, the following Member States have added their names to the list of sponsors: Israel, Italy, Mali, Singapore and the United States of America.

It is my hope that this important draft resolution will be adopted by consensus.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly will now take action on draft resolutions A/60/L.21 and A/60/L.24 as orally revised.

The Assembly will first consider draft resolution A/60/L.21, entitled "Deferral of the smooth transition period for the graduation of Maldives from the list of least developed countries".

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.21?

> *The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 60/33).*

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/60/L.24, as orally corrected, entitled "Public administration and development".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.24, as orally corrected?

> *The draft resolution, as orally corrected, was adopted (resolution 60/34).*

Mr. Latheef (Maldives): The consensus adoption of draft resolution A/60/L.21, entitled "Deferral of the smooth transition period for the graduation of Maldives from the list of least developed countries", not only gives hope and encouragement to my country, it also demonstrates the unwavering commitment of the international community to truly ensure a smooth transition for graduating countries so that their development plans and projects will not be interrupted due to graduation. That decision has given us confidence that the international community will stand by us and render whatever assistance may be necessary to repair the damage caused by the tsunami to the Maldives and to move ahead with the development process.

On behalf of my country, allow me to take this opportunity to extend our sincere appreciation to the entire international community for the understanding and support it has extended to us in the formulation and consensus adoption of the resolution. With particular gratitude, I wish to reiterate our heartfelt appreciation to the members of the Group of 77 and China, especially to its Chairperson, for the solidarity and the unqualified support they have extended to my country on this issue. I would also like to extend our very sincere thanks to the European Union, Japan and the United States of America for the understanding and flexibility that they have shown in accommodating our request for an extension. We will always remember the difficult concessions they made in order to reach agreement. We would also like to put on record our thanks for the unwavering support from President Clinton, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Tsunami Recovery, as well as his office. Last but not the least, allow me to express our sincere gratitude to Mr. Carlos Gabriel Ruiz Massieu Aguirre of Mexico for the helpful manner in which he facilitated the resolution.

We know of no country or region that has successfully attained full recovery from a disaster of this scale in three years. We are therefore aware of the challenges that lie ahead of us. However, we are a determined people, and we would like to assure the Assembly and the international community that we will leave no stone unturned to achieve our recovery. We fully understand that the tsunami has placed serious obstacles in the path of our vision of becoming a middle-income developing country by 2020. Nevertheless, our resolve will not be weakened. We are confident that, once again with the help of our development partners, we will build better and emerge from the disaster stronger than ever and proceed with the process of graduation as specified in resolution 59/209.

The Indian Ocean tsunami has yet again demonstrated the extent of the vulnerabilities faced by small island States like the Maldives. No single island

of my country was spared in the disaster. Within a matter of minutes, most of the development progress that we have worked so hard to achieve over many decades, along with the basis for the decision to graduate our country, was literally washed away and destroyed.

Nearly a year has passed since the disaster, but the situation in the Maldives has not eased. The disproportionate economic impact of the tsunami on my country is far too great for us to rebound easily. The disaster has effectively paralysed the economy. We pray that that will only be temporary. Rising oil prices, unforeseen tsunami-related expenditures and revenue shortfalls in the tourism sector are creating significant fiscal pressures at alarmingly high levels. As a direct result of that situation, for the first time in our history we are now faced with an acute financial crisis and are forced to appeal for budgetary support from our development partners and other friendly countries.

Before I conclude, allow me also to say here that there is still a major funding gap in my country's national tsunami recovery and reconstruction programmes. Of a total $470 million needed for the programme, nearly a third is yet to be pledged. The Maldives is the only country experiencing such a funding gap. While we express our deep appreciation to our development partners and the entire world community for the most generous assistance that they have already extended to us, we would like to make a plea to the international community for further assistance to bridge that gap as soon as possible, for it will be almost impossible for us to pull ourselves out of this disaster without such help.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of agenda item 41.

Agenda item 120 (continued)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Draft resolution (A/60/L.26)

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of China to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.26.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I am honoured to introduce, under agenda item 120, for consideration by the General Assembly draft resolution A/60/L.26, entitled "Enhancing capacity-building in global public health".

This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. The recently held World Summit reviewed the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and adopted the World Summit Outcome. Leaders at the summit made a series of solemn commitments on HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other health issues. One of the MDGs is to curb and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. That is also an important element of the World Summit Outcome. The United Nations and its Member States should strengthen their cooperation and continue their efforts to fulfil those objectives.

Currently, the international community continues to face serious challenges in the field of public health. The threat of avian influenza and other infectious diseases is far from over, and the possibility of the outbreak of a large-scale pandemic still exists. The Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, the earthquakes in South-East Asia and other national disasters have posed even greater threats to public health systems. And they are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the global public health crisis facing humanity in the twenty-first century.

The international community should have already realized that the weakness of the public health system has become a major problem for countries in their efforts to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development against the backdrop of globalization. The issue of public health is not limited by national borders; our efforts in that regard can never be successful without close regional and international cooperation. Only by responding to these challenges through joint efforts on the part of all Member States can we build a harmonious society through coordinated and sustainable economic and social development.

The Chinese Government attaches great importance to public health. In recent years, we have invested heavily in enhancing capacity-building in public health and in improving the emergency response mechanism, and we have made vigorous efforts to prevent and treat major infectious diseases. Through our cooperation with many other countries and with the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Bank and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, we have accumulated valuable experience in fighting

HIV/AIDS, malaria, severe acute respiratory syndrome and highly pathogenic avian influenza, as well as in post-disaster rescue, treatment and disease control. We are confident that, with the international effort to enhance capacity-building in global public health, the internationally recognized health-related development goals will be achieved.

For those reasons, the Chinese delegation is for the third time introducing this draft resolution to the General Assembly under the same title. Consensus was achieved among interested parties through extensive consultations.

This year's draft embodies the health-related commitments set out in the World Summit Outcome (*resolution 60/1*) with a view to its implementation. It reinforces itself through elements such as national capacity-building and the training of health personnel. It calls upon all countries to implement the revised International Health Regulations, expresses concern about a possible pandemic of human influenza arising from avian influenza and welcomes relevant responses by the United Nations and other appropriate international and national measures.

In addition, the draft resolution urges the international community to raise awareness about the deleterious impact of natural disasters on public health systems and to strengthen international cooperation in related areas. It requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session a report on the implementation of the resolution, which will be his first report to the Assembly exclusively on public health.

There were 167 sponsors of the draft resolution when it was first submitted. Since then, the following countries have become sponsors: Brazil, Egypt, the Gambia, Ghana, Grenada and Serbia and Montenegro. On behalf of the Chinese Government, I would like to sincerely thank all the sponsors and those who participated in the consultations. We hope that the General Assembly will adopt draft resolution A/60/L.26 by consensus.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/60/L.26.

I shall call on those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of position before action is taken on the draft resolution. May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mrs. Núñez de Odremán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to express the commitment of the Venezuelan State to capacity-building in the area of public health. We firmly believe that the development and implementation of public health policy are among the main mechanisms for fighting poverty and social exclusion in our population.

In that connection, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has believed that health and quality of life are the main policy axes of a new approach, as a human and social right inherent to life. Therefore, they are of great public relevance and constitute an area for intersectoral implementation based on a commitment to joint responsibility on the part of all public sectors.

For that reason, we have developed the Inner-City Mission, aimed at providing basic services to the entire population — particularly those perpetually excluded — as a priority of our health policy, which is guided by the principles of equity, universality, accessibility, not requiring payment, cross-sectoral implementation, cultural inclusion, participation, justice and shared social responsibility.

Furthermore, we express our support and appreciation to the delegation and the Government of China for introducing this draft resolution. We support its contents and join in the consensus. However, we wish to express our reservation about the second preambular paragraph of the draft resolution — which is the reason why we decided not to sponsor it — although the draft resolution is fully in line with our commitment and our domestic policy. As the General Assembly is already aware, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela does not recognize the outcome document (*resolution 60/1*) as part of the results of the 2005 world summit. Therefore, that document generates no mandate or obligation for the Republic.

Mr. Cumberbach Miguén (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation, as a sponsor of draft resolution A/60/L.26, wishes to make clear that our statement is of a general nature.

Ever since the triumph of the Cuban revolution, international cooperation has been one of the pillars of our country's foreign policy. The strengthening of this

important aspect of international relations has been endorsed in the outcomes of United Nations summits and conferences, including the Millennium Summit.

For years, Cuba — despite the fact that it is a small developing country and has been subjected for more than 45 years to the blockade policy of the United States — has developed a cooperation programme that has placed special emphasis on helping to build the national public health capacities of the countries that have requested such aid, particularly developing nations. We have done so through the presence of health personnel on the ground and by granting thousands of scholarships to young people in many brotherly nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

That is why we wish to thank the delegation of the People's Republic of China for introducing draft resolution A/60/L.26, entitled "Enhancing capacity-building in global public health". We are convinced that that text — which is supported by the sponsorship of more than 170 delegations — will help to strengthen the role of the United Nations in promoting improvements in health in our world. That is an essential issue if we wish to attain the development objectives set out in the Organization's agenda, particularly those agreed at the Millennium Summit.

Moreover, the initiative recognizes the need to strengthen cooperation mechanisms in the area of public health this year, when we are dealing with the consequences of natural disasters. That question is of singular importance to the countries of the third world. Nothing could be more relevant given that we have witnessed in recent months the devastating effects of these phenomena, which are increasingly difficult to mitigate. Indeed, our country has undertaken new initiatives in that regard.

Our delegation wishes to reiterate Cuba's willingness to continue to work towards agreement on global actions in the field of public health in order to help those most in need and to contribute to creating a better world for all.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in explanation of position before a decision is taken.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/60/L.26, entitled "Enhancing capacity-building in global public health".

I should like to inform the Assembly that since the introduction of the draft resolution, Angola has become a sponsor.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.26?

Draft resolution A/60/L.26 was adopted (resolution 60/35).

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 120.

Agenda item 15 ***(continued)***

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/60/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/539)

Draft resolutions (A/60/L.28, A/60/L.30, A/60/L.31)

Mr. Abdul Azeez (Sri Lanka): The 10th of this month of November marked the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment by the General Assembly of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We were reminded on that day by the Committee that that anniversary was an opportunity for us to reflect upon the decades of failed efforts to resolve the question of Palestine and to redouble our efforts to bring about a just solution of that question.

The continued relevance of the Committee's mandate to the pursuit of peace, freedom and justice for the Palestinian people cannot be overemphasized. Since its establishment in 1975, the Committee has made commendable efforts to promote the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to mobilize international support for their cause. It has advanced a number of initiatives to ameliorate the plight of the Palestinian people and to keep the focus continuously on issues of vital concern to them. We thank Ambassador Paul Badji for his initiative and leadership in that regard.

Sri Lanka has consistently supported the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and their

right to an independent sovereign State based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), and other relevant resolutions.

The newly elected President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapakse, has been an abiding friend of the Palestinian people. I wish to quote the message he sent on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

> "Sri Lanka has consistently advocated for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and extended our firm and unequivocal support to their just struggle in obtaining their rights, including the right to statehood.
>
> "In my public life of over 30 years, I have associated myself with the cause of Palestine and supported activities in my country and elsewhere aimed at promoting the rights and freedoms for Palestinian people.
>
> "The reports on the continued hardships and deprivations suffered by the Palestinians almost on a daily basis fill me with profound sorrow. While expressing my concern on such incidents, I sincerely hope that the efforts to put an end to violence and take forward the peace process will soon bring successful results.
>
> "On behalf of the Government and the people of Sri Lanka, I take this opportunity to reaffirm our continuing solidarity with the Palestinian people and to share their hopes and aspirations of seeing an end to foreign occupation, realizing a Palestinian State and a durable peace." (*See A/AC.183/PV.290.*)

During the past year, we have witnessed the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the holding of a meeting between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, and, more recently, the conclusion of the agreement on the Gaza-Egypt border crossing between Israel and Palestine.

These developments enhance the prospect of reviving the peace process within the framework of the Quartet road map and should be welcomed. However, the continuation of violence and attacks on civilians, the intensified expansion of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the continued construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, in contravention of international law, remains a matter of deep concern.

The summit meeting between the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian Authority President held at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, early this year, created fresh momentum towards the resumption of the peace process. They were able to reach understandings on a number of important issues, most importantly a commitment to cease all acts of violence.

We welcome the removal of all Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank and the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip. Despite the withdrawal, Israel's control of the borders had prevented the free movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza and stood in the way of the achievement of the desired goal of economic development for the Palestinian people, who for far too long have undergone extreme hardships in terms of their living conditions.

We hope that the agreement on the Gaza-Egypt border crossing between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, reached on 15 November 2005, will facilitate the free movement of the Palestinian people and improve their economic situation. Furthermore, we believe that this will contribute to the confidence-building measures between the parties and help them to renew their focus on the peace process and address other pressing issues such as the need to end violence, stop settlement activities and improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

We appreciate the recent efforts made by the Quartet members for advancing a peaceful settlement and hope that the international community will continue to work towards the achievement of a peaceful solution and the establishment of a Palestinian State, existing side by side with Israel, within secure and recognized boundaries.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the very outset, and on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to reiterate the solidarity of the Government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the Palestinian people and authorities in their brave struggle to defend their inalienable rights.

May I also take this opportunity to express my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his informative reports and to the Chairman and the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their

tireless and determined efforts to address the onerous circumstances of the Palestinians.

This year's report once again illustrates the uninterrupted and increasing violations of the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people by the Israeli regime, which have resulted in the deterioration of the situation to an unprecedented and intolerable level. As the report indicates, throughout the period under review the systematic pattern of human rights violations and massive breaches of international law and international humanitarian law by Israel continued unabated.

The continued unspeakable sufferings of the Palestinian people, including the rising number of deaths and injuries among civilians, the deepening humanitarian crisis and the widespread destruction of Palestinian property and infrastructure, are but the direct consequences of the unlawful and inhumane policies and practices of the Israeli regime in the occupied territories.

Over the past six decades, Palestinians have been subjected to persecution, punishment and deprivation simply because of their wish to exercise their legitimate and inalienable rights, especially the right to live in their homeland. Annexation of the occupied territories, construction of new settlements in the territories occupied in 1967, implementation of a policy of apartheid by segregating Palestinians of some residential areas from the others, construction of the separation wall and deportation of Palestinians: these and many other transgressions threaten the lives of Palestinian men, women and children on a daily basis and are but a few examples of the inhumane Israeli policies and cruel measures which have prevailed throughout all these years of occupation and suppression.

Sadly, the failure of the international community to address the Palestinian issue fairly and effectively has further exacerbated this condition. We are commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people while — as the realities on the ground abundantly suggest — Israel continues to defy the will of the international community, particularly numerous United Nations resolutions and decisions. As noted in the reports of the Secretary-General and the Committee, during the period under review and in defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the unambiguous appeals by the international community, the Israeli regime has continued the construction of the illegal wall in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Moreover, Israel has even announced its decision to accelerate plans for completing the wall. The direct and grave impact of this ongoing illegal practice on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and on the prospect for achieving a just and lasting solution for the Palestinian situation is indeed indisputable.

Furthermore, as the report of the Committee illustrates, settlement construction and expansion in the West Bank has continued apace over the past 12 months. New facts on the ground were also accompanied by alarming reports of plans for intensified construction in the West Bank settlements, in contravention of international law. In addition, the Israeli regime's plan to enlarge settlements in the West Bank would be, if implemented, the largest expansion project ever witnessed and would involve the confiscation of an area larger than the Gaza Strip.

A disturbing fact regarding the Gaza disengagement has been pertinently spelled out in the letter from the representative of Palestine to the Secretary-General. This plan, despite Israel's massive propaganda campaign, has been implemented concurrently with the increase of settlement activities, acceleration of the construction of the illegal wall and the complete isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories.

We fully share the valid concern that the focus of the international community on Gaza withdrawal has been manipulated and exploited by the Israeli regime in order to complete its colonization and de facto annexation of huge areas of the West Bank. Moreover, Israel's illegal control of the borders of the Gaza Strip, including its territorial sea and airspace, and of the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza, has turned the Gaza Strip into a vast open-air prison for the Palestinian people and has also hampered any meaningful economic development in the area.

As indicated in the reports of the Secretary-General and the Palestinian Rights Committee, in the course of this year Israeli raids into Palestinian population centres, extrajudicial killings, house demolitions and arrests continued unabated. The humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people remained grave and standards of health and education continued to deteriorate. Close to 4,000 Palestinians

have been killed and 40,000 wounded since the start of the intifada, while Israel has made a total of 35,000 Palestinian arrests since September 2000. The growing number of women and children directly harmed by violence and torture in Israeli prisons has been especially worrying. Over 4,000 Palestinian homes have been destroyed since the beginning of the current intifada.

Furthermore, the deliberate measures adopted and implemented by Israel to destroy the already fragile Palestinian economy have pushed the economy to the verge of collapse. Palestinian living conditions have declined dramatically and the health and nutritional status of the Palestinian population, particularly women and children, has worsened.

It is long overdue for the international community to take meaningful measures to restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The Charter of the United Nations has conferred an immense responsibility upon this world body to help find a fair and durable solution to this crisis, which constitutes the core of the Middle East conflict. We believe that a durable peace in Palestine will be possible only through the full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people, including the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland and the establishment of a Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan is also a matter of grave concern for the international community. It continues to be another source of tension in the region. The Israeli regime has thus far indicated that it does not intend to consider a withdrawal from the Golan. Rather, it has made repeated attempts to alter the demographic and legal character of the area by establishing new settlements and imposing its laws on Syrian citizens, in contravention of all relevant United Nations resolutions and principles of international law. Since the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan in 1967, the international community has always reiterated its firm rejection of that occupation and repeatedly called for withdrawal of Israel from the entire Syrian Golan.

The international community's concern over this issue has been constantly reflected in various resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, including Assembly resolution 59/33, which, inter alia, termed null and void Israel's decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Syrian Golan. In its resolution 497 (1981), the Security Council also called upon Israel to annul its decisions and actions on the Syrian Golan.

Furthermore, Israel's threats and repeated aggression against Lebanon have remained a major source of concern. The Lebanese people have already demonstrated their resolve in defending their homeland. We believe that the stability and sovereignty of Lebanon are decisive for the maintenance of regional peace and security.

The international community bears a heavy responsibility in addressing the Israeli regime's policy of threats and use of force against other Member States of the United Nations, as well as its systematic and gross violations of the basic human rights of the Palestinian people, in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Should we neglect to address this responsibility fairly and properly, the situation in this volatile region will remain bleak.

Mr. Nguyen Duy Chien (Viet Nam): It gives the Vietnamese delegation great pleasure to participate in today's discussion on the important agenda item on the question of Palestine. We would like to join other speakers in thanking the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their reports relating to the question of Palestine, as contained in documents A/60/539 and A/60/35, respectively.

It is Viet Nam's long-standing position that achieving a final and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, is imperative for the attainment of peace and stability in the Middle East. A comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and from other occupied Arab territories; recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to their State of Palestine in their own homeland; and respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries.

The two reports before us have shown that the situation relating to the question of Palestine during the period under review was marked by promise and hope, as well as by developments on the ground that complicated efforts to resume the peace process within the framework of the road map.

The Palestinian people and institutions have succeeded in achieving a peaceful, democratic and responsible transition. As noted in the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Palestinian Authority, President Mahmoud Abbas and other members of the Palestinian leadership have made serious efforts to end violence, strengthen the national unity of the Palestinian people and achieve a solution of the question of Palestine through exclusively peaceful negotiation.

The positive developments also include the resumption of dialogue at the highest level between Palestinian and Israeli leaders, the removal of all Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank and the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Gaza Strip, which we hope will lead to Israel's withdrawal from other occupied Palestinian territory. The agreement on, and the opening of, the Rafah border crossing constitutes an important step in the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Despite that progress, we are deeply concerned over the continuing violence in the occupied Palestinian territory. We are further concerned over the intensified expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the acceleration in the work to complete the illegal wall built in the occupied Palestinian territory, in defiance of the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the position of the international community. We hold that the Court's advisory opinion and international law in general must be respected. We call upon Israel to comply with its legal obligations, in accordance with the advisory opinion as well as General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004.

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, our delegation wishes to reaffirm the consistent support of the Vietnamese people and Government for the just cause of the Palestinian people in the struggle for their inalienable rights. We welcome and support efforts of the international community, including ongoing efforts of the Quartet, to promote the peace process in the Middle East, and we call upon concerned parties to exert all efforts necessary to facilitate a speedy resumption of the peace process and the conclusion of a final peaceful settlement. We believe that, with the support of the international community, the just cause of the Palestinian people will achieve full victory.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Since 1977 the General Assembly of the United Nations and all advocates of freedom and justice throughout the world have been meeting annually on 29 November to recall one of the greatest tragedies and challenges that we all face — namely, the denial by Israel of the most basic human rights of the Palestinian people, in particular the right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State on their national soil.

I wish to express my special thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Mr. Paul Badji, as well as to the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and the Special Information Programme on the question of Palestine of the Secretariat's Department of Public Information. It is the hope of Syria that the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Special Information Programme will continue their work to create greater public awareness on the question of Palestine.

Unfortunately, Palestine continues in the third millennium to languish under Israeli occupation and continues to suffer from its policies of oppression, killing and destruction, despite all the efforts made by the Arab side to arrive at a comprehensive and just solution.

There have recently been noteworthy developments in the issue of Palestine, namely the implementation by Israel of a unilateral plan for the redeployment of its forces outside the Gaza Strip and the dismantling of its settlements and the evacuation of settlers. However, despite the fact that we welcome the withdrawal by Israel from any inch of Arab or Palestinian soil, Israel has recently taken measures towards the establishment of a buffer zone in the northern Gaza Strip that extends hundreds of metres into Palestinian land. Its forces continued to bombard many parts of the Gaza Strip, using aircraft, artillery

and tanks that have taken the lives of scores of innocent Palestinians.

Israel's persistent aggression against the Palestinian people and its resort to the most heinous forms of terror and oppression without regard to any political, legal or moral considerations confirm to us that it is not yet convinced of the necessity of establishing a comprehensive and just peace in the region. This is borne out by Israel's continued incursions into the towns and villages and the refugee camps in the occupied West Bank, as well as its continued acts of killing and assassination, the large-scale detention campaigns and the imposition of collective punishment against the Palestinian people. Moreover, Israel continues its settlement activities, the construction of the separation wall and the building of by-pass roads and military checkpoints that impede freedom of movement.

Despite the fact that Israel has evacuated its settlers from the Gaza Strip and from four settlements in the northern West Bank as a result of the heroic struggle and legendary determination of the Palestinian people, however, it has, in doing so, gravely misled world public opinion. It has continued to expand the settlements in the West Bank — the number of settlers now totals more than 260,000, more than 130,000 of whom live within 11 settlements in and around the city of East Jerusalem, occupied since 1967.

Israel has continued its blockade of the occupied city of Jerusalem and has prevented Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from reaching it. It has continued to isolate it from its Palestinian environment and to alter its cultural, demographic and geographic character. It has completed 130 kilometres, about 70 per cent, of the construction of the separation wall that surrounds the Holy City, which will contain almost 20 settlements, isolating 250,000 Palestinians from their natural geographic and demographic environment.

Israel has accelerated the construction of new parts of the infamous racist separation wall, resulting in the confiscation of thousands of dunums of Palestinian land, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and General Assembly resolutions, and in total disregard for the positions of many countries, including those friendly towards Israel. As a result, a number of Palestinian villages and towns have been turned into isolated bantustans, surrounded by walls on all sides. In flagrant defiance of the United Nations and its resolutions, the Prime Minister of Israel recently declared that his Government intended to continue to build settlements in the West Bank and the Golan, as well as to complete the construction of the separation wall.

The expansion of the Israeli settlements has been accompanied by acts of violence and terrorism by Israeli settlers and the Israeli army against innocent Palestinians, in particular during the past five years. The recent Israeli escalation has dealt a real blow to peace efforts at all levels and has weakened our hopes for achieving substantive progress in the peace process.

When considering the question of Palestine and the reasons for the lack of a just and comprehensive solution to the situation in the Middle East, the overwhelming majority of United Nations Members must ask themselves the reason why the situation is as it is. The Security Council has adopted historic resolutions in this context, in particular resolution 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). However, Israel has refused to comply with the will of the international community. Some States have sought to implement arbitrary decisions that have absolutely no basis in international law against States in Africa and the Middle East, and the Arab side has accepted such decisions, despite their inherent injustice. Yet certain States members of the Security Council do not lift a finger to compel Israel to implement the Council's resolutions. That, unfortunately, is the sad reality.

What is the reason for the unstable situation in the Middle East and the continued tension and spiral into violence there? The true, honest answer is to be found in the scandalous double standards and lack of sincerity on the part of the protectors of Israel when it comes to implementing United Nations resolutions. Some of them do not even participate in the vote on the relevant draft resolutions in the General Assembly. That represents a true deviation from the logic of international legality.

The continued Arab-Israeli conflict, the ongoing occupation of the Arab lands in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon and the absence of any real prospects for peace continue to impede the region's progress towards political, economic and human development. Syria's position with regard to peace, and its frame of reference, has always been consistent and credible. We

look to the States Members of the United Nations to provide true support for the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions leading to a compete Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and the Palestinian territories to the borders of 4 June 1967, as well as its withdrawal from the Lebanese Shaba'a farms.

President Bashar Al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, in his historic statement of 10 November, reiterated his serious support for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who was visiting Syria. He supported the Palestinian people's struggle for the restoration of their rights and promised to do everything he could in that regard.

The international community is unanimous in its belief that a just, comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the resolution of the question of Palestine — under consideration today — can be achieved only through the full implementation of internationally binding resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Arab party to the peace process has consistently respected internationally binding resolutions and the terms of reference on the basis of which the peace process was established in 1991. At the same time, Israel has continued to resort to all kinds of deception and misleading ploys in order to distance itself from those terms of reference and to ignore the international will in order to both gain land and win peace. That has prevented the establishment of the desired comprehensive and just peace.

Israel is well aware that peace can be achieved only through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on Palestinian territory, with its capital in Jerusalem, and the compete withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese land. It is high time for the international community and the Security Council to take a firm position on Israel's policies so as to enable the Palestinian people to determine their future and establish an independent State on their land, with its capital in Jerusalem.

Mr. Laurin (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Last year during the debate on this item, in this very Hall, we spoke of a window of opportunity for the Middle East peace process and called on both parties to embrace the historic opportunity for real change in the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. Both sides have risen to the challenge, and it is critical for us in the international community to maintain and reinforce the momentum of those positive developments.

Israel has taken the historic step of withdrawing from Gaza and parts of the West Bank, and the Palestinian people have elected a leader committed to the process of political reform. Together, Palestinians and Israelis, with the support of the United States and the European Union, reached a vital border agreement that gives control of an international frontier to Palestinians for the first time. Those unprecedented events will foster economic activity in the Gaza Strip and improve the lives of ordinary Palestinians. Our discussion today on the question of Palestine within the context of those new realities will encourage a renewed sense of hope that the parties will, indeed, work for a lasting, comprehensive settlement of all issues.

It is not only in the region that we have seen some positive changes, but also here at the United Nations. Canada commends Israel's new engagement with the United Nations. We strongly supported Israel's vice-presidency of the General Assembly and welcome other breakthroughs achieved over the past year. In particular, Canada applauds Israel and its Permanent Representative for achieving consensus on the resolution entitled "Holocaust remembrance". Canada was proud to co-sponsor that resolution, along with 103 other countries.

At the same time, the Palestinian delegation has taken an approach that facilitates the negotiations regarding the draft resolutions they have submitted to the General Assembly this year. Draft resolutions have been modified to welcome Israel's withdrawal. In some instances, provocative language has been removed. We have worked very constructively with the Permanent Observer of Palestine. We applaud the proposal to withdraw the draft resolution on the situation of, and assistance to, Palestinian children. That is a step forward in reducing what we have long regarded as the excessive number of draft resolutions on the Middle East.

(*spoke in English*)

I want Canada's position on particular issues that arise here in the General Assembly to be seen in the context of our long-standing policy in the region. Canada has always been, and remains, wholly committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace

in the Middle East. We support Israel's right to live within secure borders, free from the threat of violence, conflict and terror. We also support an independent, viable, democratic and territorially contiguous Palestinian State living side-by-side in peace with its neighbours.

Canada has always strongly condemned all forms of violence and terror. Indeed, it is a widely accepted view that non-combatants should not be targeted by any means by any party to a conflict. We therefore firmly and unequivocally condemn any form of support, either direct or indirect, to terrorist organizations. The use of suicide bombings against innocent civilians is particularly abhorrent. No legitimate democratic State can ever be built through the use of terrorism. Terrorists and their supporters should immediately be brought to justice and their networks disarmed and dismantled.

Israel must also strive to build trust by refraining from unilateral actions that may prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations. Those include ensuring that the route of the security barrier does not stray from the 1967 border nor disrupt the livelihoods of Palestinian farmers working to secure a future for their families. While the withdrawal was a courageous step in the right direction, further efforts to negotiate borders should be achieved through negotiations. It is not a small point: when negotiations succeed, even in modest steps, they provide the strongest ammunition against violence.

Canada continues to look for new ways to support peacebuilding in the Middle East. We are proud to sponsor the Regional Forum for the Middle East Ministers of Justice, which is an initiative of Canada's Minister of Justice and Attorney General, and one that has been endorsed by the Palestinian Authority, Israel, Egypt and Jordan.

Canada continues to exercise custodianship and leadership in the process of seeking a just, viable and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian refugee issue.

We have increased financial and expert assistance to the Palestinian Authority to strengthen its capacity for internal reform and to build sustainable peace in the region. Canadian funds and expertise are contributing to such initiatives as building the capacity of a Palestinian border agency — which is critical to the management of safe borders — and to training programmes for Palestinian jurists. Yesterday, as a further indication of our commitment to a peaceful resolution, the Government of Canada announced its intention to establish a centre for peace and democracy in the Middle East.

In the context of those broad policy objectives and activities, let me now turn to the immediate business of the Assembly. Let me begin with the question that must be asked first of all: how can the work of the General Assembly be used to advance the objectives I have described? If the process here distracts from or undermines the effort to achieve those objectives, how can the General Assembly process be improved? In short, how can we here in New York hasten the day when the parties rise from the table following the successful negotiation of final status issues?

Last year, we announced that Canada would begin a process of reviewing its voting on the numerous Middle East draft resolutions that come before the General Assembly. While the fundamental elements of Canada's policy in the Middle East are unwavering, we believe this annual process in New York is becoming a diversion from the reality and real needs on the ground. It is divisive and unhelpful to the overall goal of strengthening dialogue and building confidence and trust among the parties. Countries, including Canada, invest time, energy and resources in analysing and negotiating draft resolutions; yet their ultimate value remains questionable. For that reason, Canada began last year to advocate more strongly for a reformed approach.

First, Canada has encouraged more constructive draft resolutions that reflect current dynamics and include mechanisms for follow-up on agreed benchmarks. To be credible and effective, draft resolutions should reflect and reinforce road map obligations.

Secondly, Canada has criticized inflammatory, provocative and divisive language in draft resolutions — language that creates a sense of imbalance and seems to suggest that it is only Israel that has obligations. The responsibilities of other actors, including Palestinians, are often not sufficiently emphasized, nor are references to Israeli security needs. Canada will not support draft resolutions that use emotive and provocative language in place of the facts.

Because of those concerns, Canada has become increasingly involved in text negotiations in order to work towards fewer, more focused and more balanced draft resolutions.

Among the many draft resolutions this year, Canada was pleased to be able to support the Fourth Committee's draft resolution on Israeli settlements. That is an issue of fundamental importance to Canada. Likewise, Canada will again be supporting the draft resolution before us now on Jerusalem.

Canada's position is that Jerusalem remains an issue for negotiation by the two sides and that Israel should desist from measures that pre-empt such negotiations and risk complicating a peaceful resolution. That includes measures such as the expansion of settlements within and around Jerusalem. Our support of both draft resolutions would not have been possible without the flexibility and openness shown by the Palestinian Observer Mission during those negotiations.

Last year Canada changed its vote on four of the annual Middle East draft resolutions so that they more closely reflect Canadian policy towards the Middle East. This year we have serious concerns with respect to three additional draft resolutions.

As we indicated last year when we voted against the draft resolution entitled "Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People" we believe scarce United Nations resources should be committed solely to bodies that can clearly demonstrate achievements in support of the peace process. In the same light, we have considered the work of the Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights, which supports the Committee, and have decided to vote against the draft resolution pertaining to its mandate. In our explanation of vote on last year's draft resolution, we indicated that we would vote against the draft resolution in the absence of demonstrable value having been added. We do not believe that has been achieved over the past year.

We have also raised concerns with its authors about the draft resolution entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine". While Canada strongly and unshakeably supports the premise of that draft resolution, we also believe that that broad draft resolution requires a stronger and more unequivocal condemnation of suicide bombings. That can be achieved by expressing such condemnation in a stand-alone paragraph. Such an explicit condemnation could help to end the use of terror throughout the region and beyond. We have heard no valid argument against that proposal. Accordingly, we will not be able to support the draft resolution without a stand-alone paragraph condemning suicide bombings.

Finally, Canada stated last year that it felt the draft resolution entitled "The Syrian Golan" unfairly placed the responsibility for renewed negotiations on Israel. While the reality is that confidence-building measures and good-will gestures are needed from both sides, we believe the language in that draft resolution is unbalanced and unhelpful to the overall goals of the peace process. Furthermore, we do not support the annual tabling of the draft resolution in plenary while every year the Assembly adopts a broadly supported draft resolution from the Fourth Committee on the Syrian Golan issue. For those reasons we will vote against the draft resolution.

I mentioned that Canada continues to seek new ways to build peace and dialogue among the parties in the Middle East. We find the process of these resolutions less than helpful in achieving the goal we all seek — peace in the Middle East — and we are of the view that the resolutions do not contribute to a balanced starting point, which is so critical to ensuring a successful outcome.

We will start the process of building the consensus necessary for an inclusive and thorough draft resolution on the peace process that is free of divisive rhetoric, accurate, detailed in approach and balanced in outcome. We will seek and welcome the support of all nations.

In doing this, we will be further assisting the continuing reform of the United Nations by helping to ensure a sharper focus on outcomes. By moving in that manner, we hope we can make the United Nations a key player in driving real change at this important time. We hope that all nations will engage with us towards that goal. We also hope in this way to improve the tone of the dialogue by reducing the politicization of the debate. That is our goal and the task that will drive Canada's work at the United Nations on that important region. We hope that all Member States will join with us in that endeavour.

Mr. Assaf (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General and to the Committee on the

Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the two reports they have submitted to us under the agenda item, and for their efforts to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The question of Palestine continues to be the most important and the oldest of the issues on the agenda of the United Nations, and the United Nations continues to be permanently responsible for the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects.

Our discussion on the question of Palestine this year leaves us with mixed feelings of hope and an awareness of the challenges that lie ahead. Israel's withdrawal on 12 July from the Gaza Strip constitutes a step in the right direction and strengthens our view that peace can be possible only when the will to make peace exists.

However, there are still many challenges to the achievement of all the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as stipulated by General Assembly resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 1974, namely, the right to self-determination, the right to political independence and the refugees' right to return.

The most important of the challenges can be outlined as follows. First, Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip must be complete and comprehensive and should be the first step towards a complete withdrawal from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank, an area comprising 5,800 square kilometres. One should keep in mind that Israel has not yet completed its pledge made at the 2005 Sharm el-Sheik Summit, because it ceded control of only two of the five cities in the West Bank that it pledged to hand over to the Palestinians.

Secondly, Israel still maintains 200 settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. The settlements are inhabited by about 400,000 settlers, an increase of 12,800 in the West Bank during the last year alone. At the beginning of 2005, Israel revealed a plan to construct 3,500 new residential units in the West Bank. That plan is another violation of Security Council resolution 465 (1980) which considers settlements illegal and as obstacles to peace.

Thirdly, Israel continues its construction of the separation wall, which extends 720 kilometres — 90 per cent of which is inside the West Bank, sometimes to a depth of 22 kilometres. The wall imposes a unilateral solution and when completed will lead to the absorption of about 1,000 square kilometres of West Bank territory. Needless to say, Israel's construction of the separation wall fundamentally violates and ignores the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004, which viewed the wall as illegal and called upon Israel to demolish it and to compensate the Palestinians for any damage it has caused.

Fourthly, the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees has existed for the past 57 years. Some 4.3 million Palestinian refugees are suffering and homeless in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. Israel still rejects the return of the refugees to their homeland, in violation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and Security Council resolution 237 (1967).

Fifthly, Israel continues its aggression against Palestinian civilians, which has led to the deaths of approximately 4,000 Palestinians and the wounding of approximately 40,000 Palestinians, and has resulted in the arrest of 35,000 Palestinians since the beginning of the intifada in 2000. In that regard, we reiterate our support for General Assembly resolution 59/31 of 1 December 2004, on the need to treat civilians throughout the Middle East as neutrals and to condemn acts of violence committed against all civilians, including extrajudicial killings.

Lastly, we reaffirm our commitment to peace and to a solution based on the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure borders recognized according to the 1949 Armistice Line, the land-for-peace principle and relevant United Nations resolutions, including Assembly resolution 194 (III) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Since the beginning of this year, thanks to the efforts of the Palestinian and Israeli sides and to mediation by the international community, the Palestine-Israel situation has witnessed a relaxation rarely seen over the past four years and more. It is a commonly shared view that 2005 has been an opportune year for the Middle East peace process. We welcome the smooth transition of the Palestinian leadership, the two meetings between President Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon and the withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank. These are all major

steps towards the settlement of the Palestine-Israel question.

Undoubtedly, there still exist differences between Palestine and Israel, and there are numerous difficulties facing the resumption of peace talks. To seize the opportunity and realize the hopes, leaders on both sides need to demonstrate political courage and wisdom and work together. Only when the parties concerned genuinely start to build mutual trust and implement the road map for peace in the Middle East can the final goal of peaceful coexistence between two independent States be achieved.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East question. We believe that the solution to the Palestinian issue lies in conducting political talks in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, and in building an independent Palestinian State based on the road map. This not only is in keeping with the fundamental interests of Palestine and Israel and of all other countries in the Middle East but would also facilitate the early attainment of peace and stability in the region. It should become a common goal for the international community and all parties concerned.

Peace between Palestine and Israel cannot be achieved without effective international support. We appreciate the positive efforts made by the Quartet and others to promote the Palestine-Israel peace process. We hope that even greater efforts will be made to push for early implementation of the road map by Palestine and Israel.

As an important organization for the maintenance of world peace and security, the United Nations too should effectively fulfil its responsibilities in this regard.

Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel talks are both important parts of the Middle East peace process. Comprehensive peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved without appropriate solutions to the Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel disputes. An early resumption of these two sets of talks and progress on the issue will help bring about comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We hope that the countries concerned will resume their talks at an early date and will seek mutually acceptable solutions in accordance with the principles set out at the Madrid Conference.

Recently, the situation in Lebanon and Israel has become the focus of attention. China wishes to express its condolences to the family of Mr. Rafik Hariri. We strongly condemn the bomb attack that took Mr. Hariri's life and support Mr. Detlev Mehlis in leading the International Independent Investigation Commission in its conduct of an independent and impartial investigation. We hope that the Commission will bring the truth to light at an early date so that justice is done on behalf of the victims. At the same time, in the process of conducting and completing the relevant investigations, full consideration should be given to the situation in that region, which involves many complex and interlinking elements, so as to avoid any new flare-ups of tension or turbulence.

China, like all others, has followed closely the situation in the Middle East throughout and has provided support to the Middle East peace process. In recent years, Chinese leaders and our Middle East special envoy have paid visits to the region on many occasions, with a view to seeking political solutions to the Middle East question. We will, as always, continue to work with all peace-loving forces and to play a constructive role in bringing about a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mrs. Asmady (Indonesia): The year 2005 has witnessed positive developments in the Middle East. In particular, the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in February, the London meeting in support of the Palestinian Authority the following month and the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the northern part of the West Bank last August have kindled a glimmer of life in the peace process.

Despite those developments, however, at the same time the situation in the occupied territories has deteriorated. We are witnessing the intensified expansion of Israeli settlements in other parts of the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem, and an acceleration in the completion of the illegal wall built in the occupied Palestinian territory, which is clearly in contravention of Israel's obligations under the road map and a violation of international law. Moreover, it is being done with total disregard for the relevant advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. This undermines the positive momentum generated by the Gaza withdrawal and the understanding reached at Sharm el-Sheikh.

Meanwhile, at its sixty-first session, the Commission on Human Rights reaffirmed that the construction of the wall violates Israel's obligations under international human rights law, particularly with respect to the freedom of movement of Palestinians and their right to adequate housing, food, family life, education and health care.

While we recognize Israeli disengagement from Gaza as a positive step, my delegation would like to make its position clear: disengagement involves only a small fraction of the land Israel occupied in the 1967 war; therefore it should be accompanied by Israeli withdrawal from all remaining occupied lands. Furthermore, Israeli forces are still exercising control over the movements of people and over Gaza's borders, coastline and airspace, allowing Israel to launch incursions at will. Also, this disengagement has done little to improve the living conditions of Palestinians.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to report difficulties in trying to deliver assistance to Palestinian refugees. The living conditions of the refugees have been severely affected by violence and by Israel's closures and its destruction of properties and livelihood. There is a general increase in food insecurity and a severe shortage of drinking water, as well as a decline in food consumption and nutritional levels. Israel's policies of continued violence against innocent civilians, internal and external closures and military incursions have aggravated the economic hardships of the Palestinian refugees.

The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories has also been denied access by Israel to visit the occupied Palestinian territories. We are deeply disturbed by Israel's efforts to hinder the Special Committee's access to the needy and to information about objective conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We are also deeply concerned that, according to the report of the Special Committee (*A/60/380*), 70 Palestinians have been shot dead by Israeli settlers since the second intifada. None of those settlers has been arrested and brought to justice by the Israeli authorities. Meanwhile, Israel continues to demand the right to protect its civilians from attacks by Palestinian militants.

The brutality of the Israel Defence Forces and attacks by Israeli settlers have together led to the death of 834 Palestinians, including 13 women and 165 children. It is therefore obvious that the Government of Israel must also stop the attacks by illegal Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and that it must bring the perpetrators to justice.

Indonesia wishes to recall its support for the final document issued at the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in Geneva on 8 and 9 March 2005, which called on the international community to adopt measures to persuade the Government of Israel to comply with international law and with the advisory opinion of International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, and called on the Quartet to redouble its efforts and to continue to work closely with the parties, together with other international and regional actors, to implement the road map in order to achieve a just and lasting settlement of the conflict.

As we are approaching the end of 2005 — which is the target time frame for the establishment of the State of Palestine under the terms of the road map — the international community must continue to put pressure on Israel to fully implement the road map. Israel must also be pressured to halt the construction of the wall, to comply with its obligation to protect civilians, to assist the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in delivering humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees, and to authorize the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories to visit the occupied Palestinian territories.

My delegation wishes to reiterate that the question of Palestine must be resolved in accordance with international law, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), which guarantee the establishment of a sovereign, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel. In that regard, my delegation calls on the international community to support the people of

Palestine in order to ensure the smooth conduct of free and fair parliamentary elections in January 2006.

In conclusion, my delegation reaffirms the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with regard to all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved.

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): For once, there have been a number of positive changes in the Middle East, which may present yet another opportunity to revitalize the peace process. However, even those hopeful signs may not amount to much unless the international community becomes fully engaged in supporting the peace process.

Israel has taken a courageous step towards ending the occupation of Gaza by withdrawing its military forces and the illegal settlements from that area, as well as from parts of the northern West Bank. For its part, the Palestinian Authority has undertaken bold efforts to reform the Palestinian security services, to re-establish the rule of law in areas that were only recently vacated by the Israeli military and to prepare for fully inclusive and democratic legislative elections.

The Palestinian-Israeli negotiations that resulted in the reopening of the Rafah border crossing between Palestine and Egypt may be the beginning of a process of cooperation between the parties, which should definitely be fully encouraged. Yet South Africa remains concerned that these latest opportunities for peace in the Middle East may be squandered if decisive action is not taken to stop the construction of settlements on Palestinian lands and to halt and reverse the construction of the separation wall.

Sixteen months ago, the General Assembly adopted resolution ES-10/15 by an overwhelming margin. That resolution upheld the finding of the International Court of Justice that the Israeli separation wall is illegal and that Israel has an obligation to dismantle the wall and to make reparation for all damages caused by its construction. The international community committed itself to further action to bring an end to the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall and requested the Secretary-General to establish a register of damages incurred by Palestinians as a result of its construction.

The General Assembly acted because the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in its entirety in accordance with the Charter, the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General, in paragraph 14 of his report (A/60/539), notes that Israel has "failed to make progress on the implementation of its core commitments under the road map". The Secretary-General further states in the same paragraph, "Government-sponsored settlement activity may have a negative impact on the territorial contiguity of Palestinian territory and thus remains a source of serious concern".

In another report, Mr. John Dugard, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, recalls that the international community has proclaimed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the need to create a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel. Yet, Mr. Dugard reports,

> "This vision is unattainable without a viable Palestinian territory. The construction of the wall, the expansion of settlements and the de-Palestinization of Jerusalem threaten the viability of a Palestinian State." (*A/60/271, summary*)

Mr. Dugard's conclusion is that the accelerated construction of the separation wall and the settlements, together with the exodus of non-Jews from East Jerusalem and other key parts of the occupied West Bank, are creating new facts on the ground in the Middle East. He concludes by arguing that "Israel has embarked upon major changes in Jerusalem in order to make the city more Jewish" (*Ibid.*).

The history of the peace process in the Middle East is that whenever there are positive indications, progress becomes threatened because the international community is slow to become fully engaged in supporting the peace process. We hope that during the sixtieth year since the founding of the United Nations, the international community will become even more committed to addressing the political issues underlying the situation in the Middle East. Humanitarian efforts are welcome, but their impact will remain limited unless the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are addressed.

Mr. Kitaoka (Japan): The past year has been one of strong progress on the question of Palestine. The Sharm el-Sheikh commitment in February, Israel's disengagement from Gaza and part of the West Bank in

August and the Agreement on Movement and Access this month all represent significant accomplishments. Although there were periods in the intervals between one step and the next during which the momentum appeared to have been lost, the process as a whole was moved forward by the impact of each positive step following a period of stagnation.

The Sharm el-Sheikh commitment was significant because it was the product of restored confidence between the leaders of Israel and Palestine, realized through direct dialogue between them. Part of that commitment has, in fact, been implemented. Japan calls upon both parties to continue to steadily implement the measures to which they have committed, such as the handover of the security responsibility in three West Bank cities.

The Government of Israel conducted the Gaza withdrawal relatively peacefully and smoothly, with firm determination, in spite of domestic political opposition. It deserves renewed commendation. The Palestinian side, for its part, made positive efforts to maintain restraint in the actions of the various parties. We hope that the cooperation between the two parties seen on the ground at the time of the Gaza withdrawal will serve as a good precedent for future measures for peace.

The agreement on movement and access represents the culmination of the tireless efforts made by the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Authority and the international community. Japan appreciates those efforts, in particular the mediating role played by Mr. Wolfensohn and Secretary of State Rice. We welcome the reopening of the Rafah border crossing on 25 November. Assistance by the European Union, as well as efforts by both parties, will be critical. Japan deeply appreciates the EU's role in the achievement of this milestone.

The remaining items in the agreement are equally important for the reconstruction of Gaza and for the stabilization of civilian life there. We hope that the agreed measures concerning the Gaza-West Bank linkage and the Gaza seaport will be implemented promptly, and that consultations between both parties concerning the Gaza airport will speedily produce a constructive result.

There is one more important thing that the two parties must achieve over and above those accomplishments: a real return to the road map. For the Palestinian side, the first step would be reform, including security sector reform, and, for the Israeli side, the halting of all actions which could prejudge the result of final status negotiations, such as any expansion of settlement activities. Both parties need to demonstrate through action their commitment to the road map.

As long as the will for peace on the part of both parties is clear, the international community will never falter in its efforts to assist them in progressing towards peace. Japan, on the occasion of President Abbas's visit to Japan in May this year, announced an assistance package amounting to $100 million for the near future, mainly to support efforts to stabilize civilian life in Gaza and the West Bank. Allocation of the funds for approximately half of the package was authorized at the time of the Gaza withdrawal.

We will continue to extend political and economic support for the achievement of progress in the peace process. We hope that, through the elections in Israel and Palestine at the beginning of next year, both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples will clearly demonstrate their commitment to the road map, which is the only viable peace plan.

There has not been much progress in the past year on the Syrian track. However, only a comprehensive peace can be a lasting peace. As is true of the Palestinian track, provided the will for peace by the parties is clear, the international community will support efforts to achieve peace. Japan reiterates its call on the two parties to make efforts in that regard, fervently hoping that peace, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), will be realized as early as possible.

Mr. Kapoma (Zambia): Once again, as at previous sessions of the General Assembly, we are called upon to discuss the important question of peace and security in the Middle East. The question of Palestine has been before the Assembly for the past 60 years and is therefore an issue which all Member States follow with keen interest. My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his incisive reports on the subject under consideration, contained in documents A/60/539 and A/60/35.

Zambia welcomes the recent developments that have taken place with regard to some aspects of the Middle East peace process. After 38 years of restrictions, the Palestinian people are today able to

cross freely at least from the Gaza Strip into the neighbouring Arab Republic of Egypt. We also welcome the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank. It is the view of my delegation that these positive and welcome developments are long overdue. Nevertheless, the State of Israel should be encouraged to build on these positive steps to achieve lasting peace in that troubled region.

As Member States are aware, the Assembly has in the past demanded, through its resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), that Israel withdraw from all occupied Arab territories acquired by conquest through the 1967 and 1973 wars.

A sovereign and independent Palestine, living in peace and security side by side with Israel and its other neighbours, remains the ultimate objective of the Middle East peace process. The way forward is therefore for the international community to continue to impress upon the parties the need to fully implement the Quartet-sponsored road map, which has been endorsed by the Security Council. My delegation calls upon the parties to the peace process, namely, the Palestinians and the Israelis, to take bold steps towards achieving the desired objectives. Given the complex nature of the peace process, the Secretary-General is urged to continue to spearhead the efforts of the international community to ensure the full fruition of the peace process.

It is clear, as indicated by recent developments, that both parties to the conflict are committed to seeking an acceptable resolution. However, there are still some outstanding issues that need urgent attention. One such issue is the construction of a separation wall by the State of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories. The construction of the wall represents not only an obstacle to peace but also a violation of the principles of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law.

My delegation holds the view that flexibility on this issue on the part of the State of Israel would greatly facilitate an early compromise that would contribute to addressing its own security concerns and thus help in reaching a satisfactory solution to the lengthy conflict in the Middle East.

My delegation is hopeful that, with the necessary commitment and determination of all concerned, a final solution to the question of Palestine will be possible in the near future. However, it will require courage, compromise and skill on the part of the leaders of the peoples of Israel and Palestine.

In conclusion, my Government fully supports the road map for the Middle East peace process and is confident that, with the necessary political will, a lasting solution will be achieved. Zambia looks forward to the early participation of the State of Palestine, as a full Member, in the deliberations of the United Nations.

Mr. Bodini (San Marino): I am taking the floor today to present the position of my Government on the question of Palestine.

San Marino traditionally supports respect for all cultures and countries. It has always encouraged all efforts towards the peaceful coexistence of peoples and has always firmly rejected provocations, violence and oppression of any kind.

San Marino would like to express its solidarity with the peoples of Israel and Palestine — who both treasure an old and noble history — and strongly supports the road map's objectives.

The history of San Marino is imbued with the search for peace and friendly cooperation among all peoples and the rejection of the logic of war and incitement to violence and conflict. Our country therefore condemns terrorism of any kind and any justification of terrorist behaviour.

San Marino commends Prime Minister Sharon for his political courage and steady commitment to disengagement and President Abbas for his tough stance towards terrorist groups and for pursuing a solution through peaceful negotiations.

Our country hopes that Israel and Palestine will continue their effort to implement the goals of the road map. We believe that the existence of two States living side by side in peace is highly desirable and, more important, possible. It is therefore necessary, at such a difficult moment in history, for countries and international organizations to reject threats and blackmail, working instead to encourage all steps towards recognition of the responsibility that every country has towards the rest of the world.

Now more than ever, the world needs stability, peace and security. In September, our heads of State and Government decided to act upon those goals and

involve our Governments and institutions in the renewed affirmation of the universal meaning of the principles in the Charter of the United Nations. San Marino honours that call and expresses its commitment to peace and understanding among all peoples.

Ms. Al-Mulla (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly's consideration of this agenda item is most important, given its close relationship to international peace and security. The Middle East, in particular Palestine, has not enjoyed stability for many decades, in spite of the region's vitality and importance. This is due to the wars that the region has suffered, which have exhausted its energies and resources. The most serious problems the region faces are Israel's continued pursuit of illegal policies and practices and its refusal to respond to peace initiatives.

Kuwait is following the tragic situation of the Palestinian people and the occupied Arab territories with great concern. The continuing deterioration of their living standards and their socio-economic situation is the result of Israeli practices that violate international laws and humanitarian laws and norms, including continued arrests and oppression, the shooting of unarmed civilians, the demolitions of homes, land confiscation, the siege of Palestinian cities and the assassination of Palestinian political and other leaders. In that context, we call upon Israel to respect the understandings reached at the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting of February 2005, which called for an end to violence.

The State of Kuwait reaffirms its full support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve all their legitimate political rights. It calls on the Government of Israel to comply with the obligations and resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the principle of land for peace and the bilateral agreements signed between the Palestinian Authority and Israel within the framework of the peace process.

We call for the implementation of all provisions and requirements of the road map. We call on Israel to end the policies of siege and starvation, its repeated and continued military raids and incursions into areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority, the destruction of infrastructure and settlement construction. We call for the release of all Palestinian prisoners and detainees, respect for the sanctity of holy sites, including the protection of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the preservation of the Arab identity of the city of Jerusalem, as we denounce all Israeli policies and measures intended to Judaize and annex the city.

Israel's continued construction of the separation wall is a flagrant violation of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights laws. Israel has not complied with the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which ruled that the separation wall constitutes a violation of the resolutions of international legitimacy. The Court's advisory opinion called on Israel to demolish the wall and compensate Palestinians who have sustained losses as a result of its construction. That construction also demonstrates a lack of respect for the will of the international community as reflected in Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004.

Kuwait considers Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank to be the first of a series of steps that must be taken to end the occupation, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, and that will lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on Palestinian national soil, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The recent agreement on the Rafah border crossing can be considered an indicator of the progress achieved. However, further progress is necessary, in particular the opening of the Gaza airport and seaport and freedom of movement both between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and within the West Bank.

Kuwait hopes that the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip will help revive peace efforts in the region, leading to Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders and its compliance with relevant Security Council resolutions, while affirming the illegality of current Israeli activities in the occupied Golan.

With regard to the concerns of our brothers in Lebanon, Kuwait continues to extend its full support for all their just demands. We call upon Israel to cease its continuing threats against Lebanon and to respect that country's sovereignty.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that comprehensive, lasting and just peace will not be achieved as long as Israel's occupation of Arab lands since 1967 continues. We would also like to reiterate

the support and commitment of the State of Kuwait for the Arab peace initiative, adopted at the Beirut summit of the League of Arab States, as one of the main pillars of the peace process. In that regard, we wish to express our appreciation for the efforts by the Quartet to lead the region towards the security and stability desired by all. The Government of Israel must realize that achieving security is an overarching desire and the right of all peoples and States of the region — not just Israel.

Mrs. Núñez de Odremán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): On 10 November 1975, the General Assembly adopted resolution 3376 (XXX), which established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The Committee is charged with recommending a programme aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights. We therefore commend the noble and significant humanitarian work of this Committee, which is grounded in the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

We feel honoured to have been admitted as an observer member of the Committee on 11 November 2003. We are similarly honoured and proud to be this year's host country to the meeting in the Latin American and Caribbean region of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which will be held in Caracas from 13 to 15 December.

We are convinced that it is necessary for the maintenance of international peace and security that, ideologies aside, relations among States adhere strictly to the Charter of the United Nations and the accepted fundamental principles and norms of international relations. Especially relevant in that regard is the prohibition of the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, non-intervention and non-interference in the internal and external affairs of States and peoples or their natural resources, and the self-determination and independence of peoples under colonial and neo-colonial domination, foreign occupation or racist regimes.

We are convinced that sovereignty is the exclusive purview of peoples, and that the destiny of the Palestinian people can only be determined by that people itself. We are also convinced that, in order for violence to end on both Israeli and Palestinian territory, Palestinians must be given full control over their land. There can be no peace while occupation continues, for occupation will always be rejected by peoples.

We believe that a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution of the Palestinian issue, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, including the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which has been supported by the General Assembly, regarding the construction of Israel's wall on occupied Palestinian territory. It must also be based on the following fundamental principles: Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem and other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States of the region to live in peace, without any sort of intervention and within internationally recognized borders; and lastly, recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, especially the right to self-determination.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela favours a comprehensive and peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We hope that negotiations to that end will be carried out in circumstances that ensure effective self-determination for the Palestinian people.

I should like to conclude by sharing with the Assembly a story by Saint Augustine, as cited by Noam Chomsky. Saint Augustine tells of a pirate captured by Alexander the Great. Alexander asks how he dares to disturb the seas. The pirate replies by asking how Alexander dares to trouble the entire world. "I have a small boat," says the pirate, "and for that I am called a thief. You have an entire fleet; for that you are called an emperor."

Mr. Dabbashi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express my delegation's appreciation for the work of the Special Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Right of the Palestinian People. We would like to commend the efforts the Committee has made since its establishment to carry out the task entrusted to it by the international community.

We are once again considering the question of Palestine. Most of us have expressed our disappointment at the United Nations for its failure in the course of 58 years to produce a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution that ensures the legitimate and inalienable rights of Palestinians, namely, their right to

return to their homes, their right to self-determination and their right to establish an independent State over their entire territory.

What is the cause of that dismal failure? The answer is in fact simple and clear. In the course of the past decades, all of us have taken note of how the Security Council deals with the Israeli entity, which has usurped Palestinian territory and scattered its people to every corner of the world. It has denied Palestinians the right to return and endeavours in every way — with the support of its allies — to alter the history, geography and even the cultural identity of the region.

The Security Council has dealt with the occupation authorities as if they were above the law and beyond reproach. All possible pressure has been brought to bear on the Palestinians to accept the fait accompli created by that entity and to abandon their demand for the recovery of their land and their struggle for that recovery.

The Israeli entity has exploited the international environment prevailing since 11 September 2001 to brand the struggle of Palestinians as terrorism. The Palestinian people are merely striving to end occupation and to restore their rights. Their struggle is legitimate and is supported by international law and norms.

Here we cannot but express our regret at the fact that a number of States that struggled against Nazism, supported the liberation movements and fought the Nazi occupation have now completely adopted the Israeli viewpoint, support the Israeli occupation and are attempting to provide justifications for the crimes perpetrated against the Palestinian people, which are no less cruel or heinous than those committed by the Nazis.

United Nations bodies, and in particular the Security Council, must put an end to such double standards. The General Assembly must strive to achieve a genuine reform of the Security Council that would ensure the abolition of the veto power, or at least its restriction, so that General Assembly resolutions do not remain a dead letter, and to ensure that international law ceases to be a law of the powerful that is interpreted according to their every whim and interest.

With respect to international law, all necessary measures must be taken to compel the Israeli entity to implement the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice handed down on 9 July 2004 concerning the construction of the separation wall in the Palestinian territories. That advisory opinion was reaffirmed by the General Assembly during its emergency special session in resolution ES-10/15, adopted on 20 July 2004.

Many plans have been elaborated over the last few decades aimed at resolving the question of Palestine, the most recent of which is the Quartet's road map. However, we have not seen any tangible progress towards the desired objective because the Quartet has left everything up to the occupying Power. It does not put forward any initiatives but always waits for Israeli acts of propaganda and then responds to them as if they were genuine initiatives.

Any progress towards a just and comprehensive solution must be based on international law and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. On 22 September 2005, during the general debate, our Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation said:

> "We believe that the solution cannot be achieved by accepting a de facto situation or by merely adopting resolutions or unrealizable plans. It will happen through a radical solution that allows and guarantees the return of all Palestinian refugees to their lands and the establishment of a democratic State on the land of historical Palestine in which Jews and Arabs live side by side, enjoying full equality, similar to the South African model, where blacks and whites reconciled after decades of conflict and bloodshed. If such a solution is not realized, with the support of the international community, the suffering of the Palestinian people will continue, and the region will continue to witness tension and conflict without peace and security." *(A/60/PV.21, pp. 3-4)*

The Middle East region will not enjoy peace or security until the international community arrives at a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and brings about the full withdrawal of the Israeli occupation forces from the Syrian Golan Heights and the Lebanese Shaba'a farms.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I should like inform members that, immediately following the debate on agenda items 14, "The situation in the Middle East", and 15, "Question of Palestine", the General Assembly will take action on draft resolutions A/60/L.28 through A/60/L.31.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.